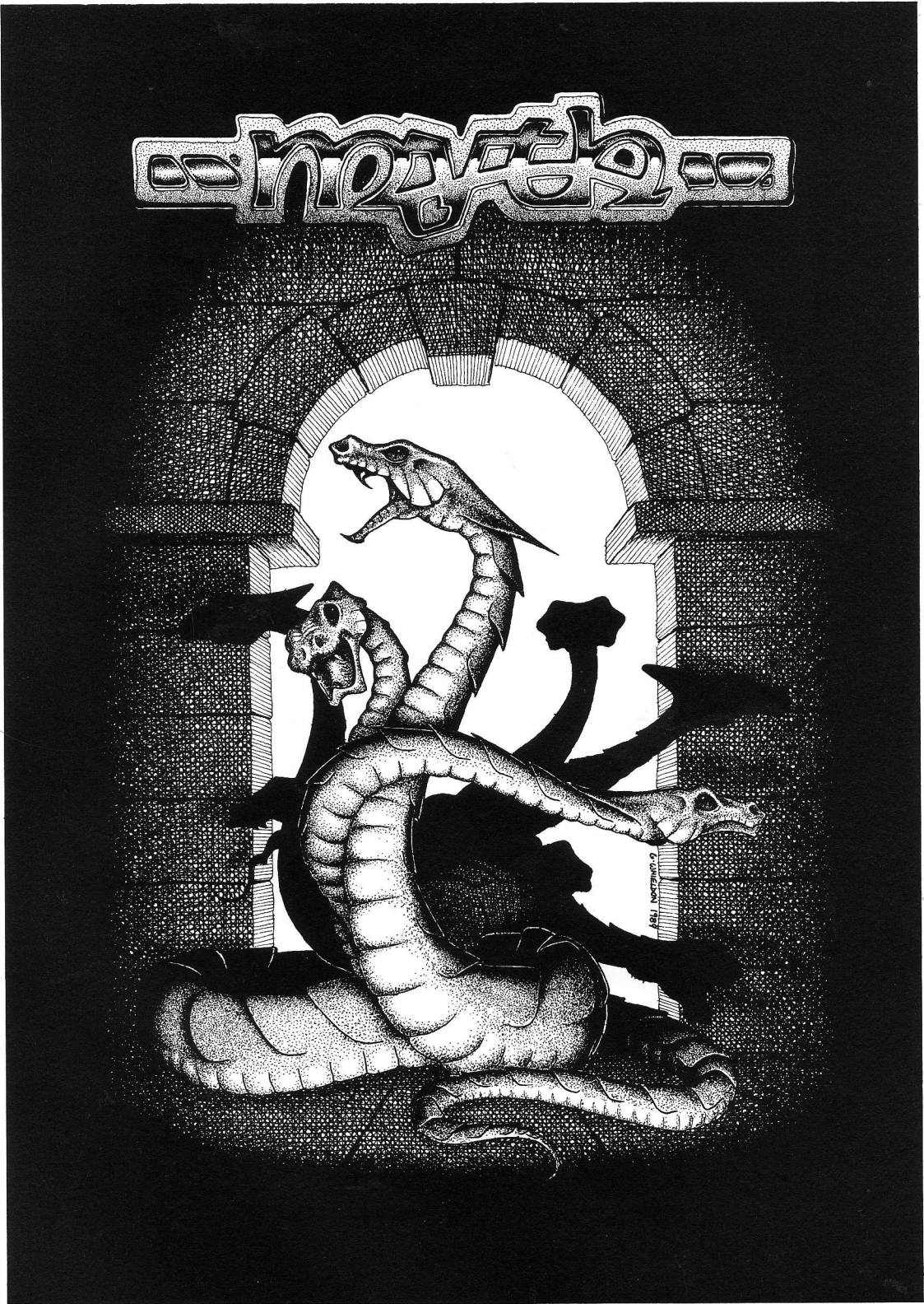


CONFIDENTIAL

FILE NUMBER FIVE
June/July 1989
Members' Eyes Only

ESMAYE



is here!

Contents

Psst... Page 2

The Boss Upstairs waxes lyrical about the problems of running an internationally famous telephone salesline in the wake of some rather amusing phone calls.

The Winners! Page 2

The Hardware Competition is over and the judges have beaten their heads to a veritable pulp in deciding who should win the coveted £500 prize. And what did they decide?

Top Secret - - Do Not Read Page 3

Straight from the European Trade Show, Agent Orange sends a report on what is up-and-coming in the field of computer adventuring.

The Sierra On-Line Story Page 5

A potted history of the family business set-up by Ken and Roberta Williams that has grown a little bit beyond the kitchen table.

Adventurous Females Page 8

As we are sure that the interview with Leisure Suit Larry will cause crowds of ardent feminists to start an encampment outside the *Official Secrets* offices, Mike Gerrard tries to balance this with a look at why so many women are involved in the strange hobby of adventuring.

It's Murder Page 10

No, not another assassination attempt on the editor, but a look at a play-by-mail game that is certainly causing a stir among the Moriarty's of this world.

Bestiary File/Bixby by Rob. Page 12

Another indispensable dollop of learning and laughter, with these two favourite features.

Bloodwych Page 13

In the aftermath of a veritable explosion of graphic role-playing games like *Dungeon Master* and *Galdregon's Domain*, here is something that is at once similar and yet totally different. John Trevillian reports. Read on.

A New Look At Infocom Page 16

Under a seeming veil of near secrecy, four new Infocom games have been released, marking a new style of adventure product and a new direction for those old masters. But is it as good, or just a marketing ploy?

Experiments In Time Page 18

Another CONFIDENTIAL exclusive! Clive Weatherley manages to complete his mission and save his neck all in one day with this last installment of his sojourns in allied France. After a spot of quick thinking, he phones Infomedia and gets the low-down on their as yet unreleased game - *Chronoquest 2*.

3rd Generation Games Page 20

Looking into the future development of adventure games, MirrorWorld's Pip Cordery talks about his plans for changes

in the multi-user sector.

Flight Simulators Page 22

Forget old hacks like Chuck Yeager, our very own Wing Commander Michael Bywater shouts 'Chocs away!' on his personal flying experiences and even manages to drop in a few lines on the best flight simulators around.

Personnel File Page 24

Throwing his cream buns to the wind, Charles Cannon dons more than his usual grin and gets to grips with Larry Laffer and his now legendary creator, Al Lowe.

Dead Letter Box Page 26

All the latest problems pinned to the wall of the CONFIDENTIAL offices.

A Process Of Elimination Page 27

Still not another assassination attempt, but a look into the Confidential Papers file - and another short story!

Puzzle Page Page 29

More thought-mangling problems to churn over in your mind in the shape of the Cryptic Crossword and the Wizard's Cottage.

Charts and Diary Page Page 30

Our Club best-sellers and unmissable dates for you to jot down in your filofax.

For Your Eyes Only Page 31

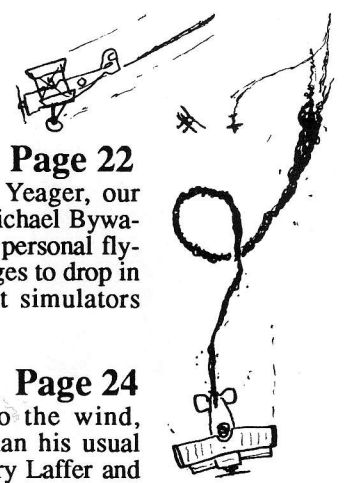
This issue sees the opening of the *Official Secrets SpeakEasy* - making it a cinch to air your views and comments.

The Back Page

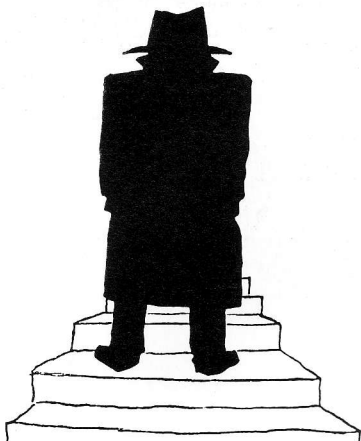
A chance once again to see the Adventurer's Diary and our Guide to what the software claims actually mean.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Boss Upstairs, in his usual warm and generous manner, wishes to thank all the people who slaved for eight weeks to put this issue of CONFIDENTIAL together, especially the team that is: John "Sexy Phone Voice" Trevillian (for not crashing his car for a whole two months), "Clever" Clive Weatherley (for finally winning the prize on *The Listener* crossword), Charles "Frank" Cannon (for putting on so many stones through eating cream buns that he now has to be air-lifted out of the office at lunchtime), and Robert "Just As Bad As Charles" Lockwood (for encouraging Agent Cannon's disgusting cream bun addiction). And a special mention to: Ken and Roberta Williams, Kirk Green and the receptionist who tried to chat up John at Sierra On-Line, Mike Gerrard, Mike Moseley, Pete James and Anthony Taglione, Pip Cordrey and his foresight of adventures to come, all at Infocom, Pete Austin and his family at Level 9, Al Lowe and the wonderful Leisure Suit Larry, Amanda Barry and her earrings, Michael Bywater, and, how can we dare forget that delectable damsel of the Domestos bottle, Vera "Who forgot to flush the toilet" Sawyer, our long-suffering cleaning lady.



...AS IF EVERYONE DIDN'T KNOW ALREADY, THESE ARE THE TICKER TAPE MESSAGES THAT GO OUT TO ALL OUR AGENTS FROM ME...



Back in the days of personal service, when armies of petrol pump attendants dutifully dashed from car to car, pump to pump, before decimal coinage and calculators, when the pound sign used to pop up in the corner of the till window, before pre-packaging of pre-cooked pre-chicken and checkout tills, when most of the shopping was done round-the-corner and carried home by the kids, there began a saying whereby "THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT".

Since then, of course, things have changed and the customer now does all the work and the shop assistant often knows absolutely nothing and does absolutely nothing except fill the shelves and take the money. "Er... excuse me please... can you tell me where I can find the cheese counter?" "Sorry dear, I'm just the Perrier Water Section Manager. If you go to the Enquiries Counter and type 'CHEESE' into the Customer Services Module, it might be able to highlight it for you on the illuminated floor plan." Consequently, the customer is not always right anymore, and the phrase goes more like "THE COMPUTERISED TILL BAR-CODE READER IS ALWAYS RIGHT. HAVE A NICE DAY".

So all this bodes well for our specialist little groups at *Official Secrets* and

Psst... A WORD FROM THE BOSS UPSTAIRS

Special Reserve, dedicated to answering peoples enquiries and doing our best to keep on top of piles of new games as they come out, or does it? The trouble is that some customers are now not the friendly, patient types that they used to be in the days of service with a smile, in fact they are far more used to elbowing their way to a fast food counter and demanding a double-relish King-size twelve-pounder without so much as a 'Please' or a 'Thank you'. The attitude of the customer has changed with the times.

Computers, especially IBM Incompatibles, do not take kindly to the fast-food attitude. That's why the Japanese games consoles have stormed the market in America; you just rip off the packaging and plug in the cartridge. Let's take an example:

"Ello, is that *Special Reserve*? My kid wants a tape. It's his birthday tomorrow. Can I order it over the phone?" During the conversation it transpires that the son in question has an IBM compatible and it's explained that these take disks, not tapes. "Which type of disk? Does it have a graphics adaptor? What type of game does he like? How old is he?"

Twenty minutes later the bemused and frustrated customer has accepted the recommendation of *Defender Of The Crown* which has both sizes of disks and both EGA & CGA graphics, so he probably can't go wrong. The details are all taken down, and we agree to bypass our system and get it in the post the same day. We ask for a credit card number and the guy says "I'll pay by cheque".

With white knuckles wrapped tightly around the phone and teeth clenched, we inform the customer very politely

that we cannot accept cheques over the telephone. He responds by cursing and slamming down the phone. The next customer phones and complains that he's been trying to get through for half an hour.

This type of situation is a reasonably common occurrence and there are also many problems caused by faulty software or instructions that are blamed on us. For example, genuine, but defective, copies of *Defender Of The Crown* put an error message on the screen which says the game is a pirate copy! People phone us and they naturally accuse us of pirating the copies we sell.

We don't expect all of our members to be computer experts and we accept that we make mistakes, just occasionally. However, we do expect a degree of politeness, and we don't accept a demanding or hostile attitude.

Official Secrets and *Special Reserve* are tailored to serve the needs of the home computer user. We gradually adapt and improve our service while keeping our prices pinned down. To get the best from a computer you need to be patient, and our best customers get our best service by being patient with us. We'll try to be as efficient as the fast food counter while offering a most varied cuisine, a detailed menu and restaurant service. And we would like you to know that our motto is "THE NICE CUSTOMERS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT."



THE BOSS UPSTAIRS

THE HARDWARE COMPETITION WINNERS!

Well, at last, the closing date for the Competition is over and the winners have been decided. Over the months that this competition has been running we have amassed quite a store of solutions to all the latest and best games around, including some quite obscure games that no one in the offices had even heard of before. As most of the people who had originally laid the foundations for this mega-competition have since met untimely ends in various ways, the panel of judges that sat down to choose the winners decided that there had to be two winners instead of one. This was because the entries seemed to fall into two categories; that of quality and that of quantity. Some people sent in one fabulously detailed solution with full maps and clue sheets, while others posted several envelopes full of solutions to us. So what should we do; lean towards the best presentation or the weight of paper? The only

THE WINNERS

QUALITY WINNER
Robert Sip

QUANTITY WINNER
John R. Barnsley

QUALITY RUNNER-UP
Eleanor Smith

QUANTITY RUNNER-UP
RGB Marshall

fair way was to split the prize. So that's what we did. A prize of £250 went to each of the winners and a huge wad of vouchers went to the runners-up.

But don't stop sending in the solutions as it is a lifeline to the Helpline. We can only play a few of the many games that arrive in our offices and rarely get a chance to finish any before the telephone calls start. From now, every person who sends in a complete solution will have their name placed in a draw; the more solutions you send in, the more chance of winning. Each issue there will be a prize for the lucky winner of a choice of any game from our catalogue.

So what are you waiting for? Who else promises to give you prizes for playing your favourite games? Only *Official Secrets*!

...AGENT ORANGE, SO GOOD TO SEE YOU...NOW AFTER YOUR HEART-FELT PLEA THAT THERE WAS NO NEWS, I HAVE DECIDED TO ADD AN INCENTIVE...

RET NEWS - - - DO NOT READ - - - TOP SECRET NEWS - - - DO NO

And we all know what The Boss' idea of an 'incentive' is, don't we? A new company car? A tribe of helpers? A refurbished coop for the pigeons? Not bleeding likely. Instead, he gave me an extra one and a half pages to fill! And there was only one place where I could possibly gather that amount of information. So off I toddled to the Business Design Centre for the...

EUROPEAN COMPUTER TRADE SHOW

by Agent Orange



Artist's Impression

While everyone else in the industry is raving about the quietly self-confident success and slickness of the first European Computer Trade Show, the games press (and in particular any unfortunate journo's with more than a passing interest in adventures) must surely be tearing their hair out at the sheer lack of anything remotely new on show.

Where were the First Ever Showings? The Exclusive Demos? The Sneako Previews? Well, they certainly weren't



present on the day I attended.

In the cool grey split-level symmetry of Islington's Business Design Centre any hint of hype may have proved a little incongruous among the tiny uniform cubicles that passed as stands. Sure, they were designed like that so that Business With A Capital B could be done and big fat hairy cheques could be signed, but a little originality and enthusiasm about new products would have been welcome. Even though there weren't the hordes of over-excited teenagers we've come to expect at other shows. Anyway, enough of the wrappings; here's a run-down of the main goodies that could be found among the designer honey-comb that was the ECTS...

Impressive artwork leapt off the grey flock of the Audiogenic stand, pushing the promising *Lone Wolf* series, scheduled for release on most machines in early June. Closely following Joe Dever's bestselling series of twelve role-playing gamebooks, the central hero will fight against numerous foes in an attempt to conquer the tower stronghold of Kazan-Gor and recover the extremely fabulous Lorestones of Nyxator. Oo-er...

Psst! A confidential snippet revealed by old mate David Darling of Code Masters, as we chatted about carnivorous rockstars and rodent cuisine and the like: after the first toe-dip into humorous strategy (expect the 16-bit *Rockstar*... in the summer),



the Darlings are planning to take the plunge into full-blown adventures in the near future and would welcome suggestions and advice. Personally I still haven't forgiven them for including a rock character called Dorrisey...

Infocom weren't at the show as such, but they were represented more than ably by Activision's Amanda Barry and her earrings. These have become a regular feature of recent publicity events and are in danger of stealing the limelight from what they're terming their Big Four: *Shogun*, in which the player must project himself into the mind of James Clavell's protagonist John Blackthorne; *Journey*, taking place in 'a graphically illustrated world of dwarves, elves, nymphs and wizards' (now there's an original cast of characters for an adventure); *Battletech*, the role-playing/combat hybrid; and last but not least,



Stun THE COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE

EXCLUSIVE ALIENS STOLE MY VOLVO! see page 5

ROCK STAR ATE MY HAMSTER
By Stan roomer COLIN JONES
EXCLUSIVE
Sexy Wimbledon masseuse Suzy Norkis, 27, last night bid how ageing sicko rockstar HAZZY HASBEEN, 73, shovelled her hamster, Bobo at a wild a vegetarian! said Hazy. Full story inside

BUBBLES - I'M FOREVER BLOWING!
Monkey Bubbles' nights of baked bean binging!
We exclusively reveal today the REAL REASON why mega moneybags rock-star WACKY JACKO seals himself in an OXYGEN TENT!
- Full story on page 5

EW DO NOT READ - - - TOP SECRET NEWS REA

S - - - DO NOT READ - - - TOP SECRET NEWS - - - DO NOT READ -



Amanda Barry and THOSE earrings? Or just another Darling?

Zork Zero, the prequel to the *Zork* trilogy, where players come face to face with Lord Dimwit Flathead the Excessive (I know him! He works on CONFIDENTIAL). Don't know about you, but I would have thought that an Infocom feature was long overdue: I'll speak to the editor chappie...



The only game where you start off lying hungover in a bath-tub in a seedy Vegas motel is new from Mindscape, *Déjà Vu II*, and will thrill if you enjoy icon-driven exploration adventures. It's also the only game ever to come with a free Humphrey Bogart jelly-mould (honest). Also showing were *Balance Of Power 1990*, and *Fire-Brigade* - no, nothing to do with cats up trees, but an Australian wargame set in the 1943 Battle for Kiev (Amiga in December, ST should be out by the time you read this).

Electronic Arts were content in showing *Populous* (quelle surprise) and wowing all visitors with its excellence. The releases they were tending to ignore, unless you sifted through the



pre-pack, were *Neuromancer*, the role-playing hacking (computer crime, that is, not samurai swords) tale set in Japan (Amiga, early June), and *Battle Chess* ('more than just a chess program, more a work of art') on the ST in mid-May. *Bard's Tale* is also about to be re-released on EA's budget Classics label, along with other titles such as *Chessmaster 2000* and *Legacy of the Ancients*.

Old Enough To Know Better Department. Bad taste release of all time, *Jack the Ripper* from CRL, is about to surface on the Amiga and ST. Hardly surprising that they fail to mention it at all on their publicity material apart from one minuscule line on a release schedule. Says it all really - avoid it at all costs. *Legend* might be slightly more ideological but again due to shoddy press info I haven't the faintest what sort of game it is. Black mark of the month...

And thanks to Cartoon Aid, who had a stand and provided the doodle above for a small donation to Ethiopia. Looks nothing like me of course (compare it to the photo in the last issue, if you don't believe me) but it was for a good cause...

Other news: Well if you're one of that strange breed of creature with more postage stamps than sense, you'll want to know all about a brand spanking new Play-By-Mail game launched in April. *Battle Crab* sounds all a bit too technical for me, but involves 500 players per game, each controlling two futuristic armed vehicles, the, er, Crabs (a contrived acronym, actually). Features include (it sez 'ere): 8,800 independent city blocks, 2 megabytes of block data per game, inter-player trading, over 100 vehicle upgrade possibilities, a unique command system, fully

functioning buildings, 500 possible alliances, etc etc. *Battle Crab* will set you back £1.20 per turn, with the starter pack costing a mere £3.00 for a User Manual, Novella, Reference Card and Starting Turn Sheet. Also available are advanced manuals and 8-foot maps, all printed to the highest quality. From: Project Basilisk, PO Box 24, Sheerness, Kent, ME12 3QU.

The winner of Level 9's *Lancelot* competition has been announced at last by the Austins, a hairy bespectacled computer engineer from Nottingham, John Sweeney, who goes away with the £5,000 replica of the Holy Grail. After elimination of thousands of contestants, John took a mere 30 hours and 20 reference books to solve the final set of clues and come up with the Grail's hiding-place - the Cerne Abbas Giant, etched in chalk in the Dorset hills. Anyone who'd like a complete solution to the Quest should send an SAE to Grail Quest Solution, Mandarin, Europa House, Adlington Park, Adlington, Macclesfield, SK10 4NP.

Well, that's it from me, time to shuffle off and leave the European Computer Trade Show far behind me. Enjoy the warm summer daze...



John Sweeney - Winner of the Holy Grail

...IT SEEMS THAT EVERYONE HAS NOW DECIDED TO GO SIERRA CRAZY... BUT WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE? GET SOMEONE ON IT, TREVILLIAN...

And thus another issue of CONFIDENTIAL begins. Task one on a never-ending list of impossible tasks was to uncover all the dirt and goings-on at Sierra On-Line. Tricky, but perhaps not as impossible as it would at first seem. Especially when you know that one of the Club members is trying to set up a UK user group. Well as they say, it's not what you know... So I met John R. Barnsley, who was taking a break after being stuck in a maze in some obscure game or other, and asked him if he'd like to bring this Californian company to our attention. He said 'No', but after a few rounds of gratuitous toe-nail pulling, he finally agreed. As I said before, it's not who you know, it's what you do to them to get articles. Still, if it squeezes miraculous gems of creative prose from people, whose complaining...

THE SIERRA



ON-LINE, INC

STORY

BY JOHN R. BARNESLEY



Brief History

In the late 1970s a young couple, Ken and Roberta Williams, were living in Los Angeles. Ken was busy writing accountancy programs for major corporations in the States and Roberta played adventure games in her spare time. All the adventures at this time were entirely text - the graphics versus text argument hadn't been born at this stage!

The 'original' computer adventure had been well played in the Williams household and Roberta longed to actually 'see' the kingdom she was exploring on screen. Ken had the technical know-how to create this and in May

1980, they decided to develop something more exciting... more as a spare-time hobby but, as we now know, one that took on a life of its own.

Their first graphic adventure was *Mystery House*, with Roberta writing the storyline and Ken committed to the programming. It was a simplistic creation featuring black and white pictures to complement the text, although the player commands were still limited to one or two words. Nevertheless, *Mystery House* was so unusual for its time that they placed a small ad in the *American Micro* magazine, informing readers that they could obtain a copy of this game to run on the Apple II for just 25 dollars. Obviously, this was still prior to IBM introducing the PC Junior and few people had any idea just how widespread personal computing would become - the Apple and TRS/80 being about the only two personal computers around at this time in



the States.

Mystery House eventually sold some 10,000 copies, much to everyone's amazement. So, from the small family project, they decided to create a business, although at that time they never envisaged just how large the computer industry was to become. The business now had to move from Roberta's modest kitchen table to the spare bedroom. A few months later they moved home to Coarsegold, California, not far from Yosemite National Park. Sierra On-Line was born!

At first they continued to operate from home, but when space again became inadequate, they moved the business to a real office over a printshop in downtown Coarsegold. Later it expanded into several other buildings. Soon, more 'new' adventure games were

climbing the best sellers chart: *The Wizard & The Princess*, *Mission: Asteroid*, *Time Zone*, *Cranston Manor*, *Ulysses & The Golden Fleece*, (whatever happened to Jason?!) and *Dark Crystal*. All of these games were fairly crude in comparison with today's standards, yet it is necessary to remind ourselves just how fast the home computer game has developed. After all, this was only about five or six years ago!

The *KING'S QUEST* Series
A major change in Sierra's game development came about a year before the IBM PC Junior was announced and they asked Sierra to create a game that would show off the new computer's colour graphics capability. IBM supplied Sierra with a prototype PC Junior and Roberta Williams set about designing a new type of adventure game. Eighteen months and a quarter-of-a-million dollars later, she and a team of six programmers had completed the task... *King's Quest*. This was back in 1984.

King's Quest was the first three-dimensional animated adventure game. The main character, Sir Graham, in the fictional Kingdom of Daventry, looked and moved on-screen like a cartoon figure. He could walk from scene to scene, disappear behind trees, swim lakes and enter buildings. *King's Quest* was a phenomenal success, partly because of its stunning graphics and partly because of its creative and



unusual storyline - Roberta always did have a fondness for fairy tales!

King's Quest casts you in the role of a dashing young knight who must find three magical treasures - a chest, a mirror and a shield - that old King Edward has let slip from his Kingdom. Success makes you King Graham on Edward's death.

In true Hollywood tradition, *King's Quest II* followed in May 1985 - as King Graham, you fall in love with a mysterious maiden named Valanice who is imprisoned in a tower in the land of Kolyrna. After overcoming many obstacles, you rescue and then

marry her.

King's Quest III followed in October 1986 - this time playing a young boy named Gwydion who is held captive in Llewddor by a wicked Wizard. You must escape to learn your true identity. When you do, you rescue your twin sister, Rosella, who is in Daventry in the clutches of a dragon. That done, you and Rosella are reunited with your parents, King Graham and Queen Valanice.

King's Quest IV is now here and this time you play Rosella on your quest. You are after an enchanted fruit that will restore your father's health after a heart attack, but along the way you must do the bidding of an evil fairy.

Well, so much for Roberta Williams' pet project with the *King's Quest* series. She plans to write a ghost story next, insisting that she has to let the adventuring public know that she can expand her horizons and do something else. There will definitely NOT be a *King's Quest V* in the foreseeable future. Ms Williams has left us wondering if the poor Graham family ever live happily ever after! Rumour in the States has it that Edgar and Rosella will eventually wed, but we shall have

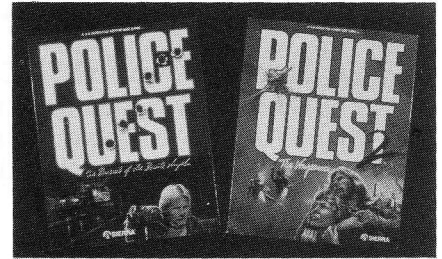


to wait and see!

So what of the other 'theme' series, by authors other than the Williams family? Two 'fun' scenarios are the *Space Quest* series and the *Leisure Suit Larry* series, while the *Police Quest* series takes a more serious outlook - the latter being based on the real-life experiences of a retired U.S. police officer.

The *SPACE QUEST* trilogy
When this series was introduced, it represented a completely different style from that of games that Sierra had produced before. According to co-authors Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy: "It's satirical, it's in space, it's funny and we love it!". Reputed to be the wackiest adventure series in the star system, three best selling episodes have been produced so far - *The Sarien Encounter*, *Vohaul's Revenge*

and *The Pirates Of Pestulan*, all featuring the infamous Roger Wilco and his zany exploits across the universe.



All three games in the series provide arcade interludes to complement the adventure system. The latter *Space Quest III* is scheduled for release in the U.K. by the time you read this and it promises to be the best one yet!

It was originally scheduled for release in 1988 but was held back by Scott and Mark (the Two Guys from Andromeda as they call themselves), so they could use Sierra's new technology which, it is claimed, introduces a new line of superior interactive movies, complete with stereo soundtracks, fully-animated cartoon sequences and double the graphics resolution of previous Sierra adventures.

Scott Murphy wanted to do a hot soundtrack for the game - he enlisted the help of Bob Seibenberg of Supertramp to do the music - and dazzling special effects that are expected from space games. We are promised that Scott and Mark even make a cameo appearance in their own game.

And the future? After Mark's recent work on a B-Grade horror movie, he's naturally considering starting work on a horror adventure game. He's not saying much except that it will be "one hell of a lot scarier than *The Uninvited!*" If all goes well, we can expect the results toward the end of 1990.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY I and *II*
Written by Al Lowe with Mark Crowe



(again!), these two 'adult' adventures follow the exploits of one Larry Laffer, firstly as a loveable nerd rated as the original blind date's nightmare and would-be swinger and secondly, as a more mature Larry (still a nerd!), on a lucky streak and looking for love.

They are both basically comedy adventure games and, although the first one is a little crude in some respects - based on the original *Soft Porn Adventure* - the second in the series is much more fun, taking you from the back streets of Lost Wages to a remote island and the eventual fulfilment of your dreams.

Larry lives on the the forthcoming *Leisure Suit Larry's Party Games*. It will not be an adventure game as such, but will be a 3-D project and VERY animated - better check it before bringing it home!

POLICE QUEST I and II

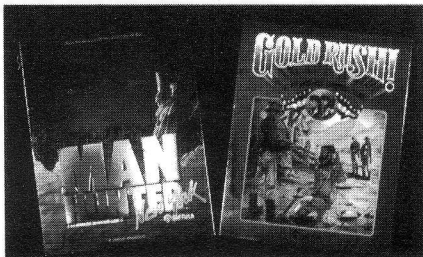
Written by Jim Walls, a retired US Highway Patrolman, these comparatively serious adventures were designed to give computer players an insight into what it is like to be a police officer in the States. Jim hoped it would give an idea of what the Patrolman feels and goes through as he carries out his duties. They are the only Sierra games so far based upon real-life situations. The 'games' not only deal with the seedier side of police life but also its daily routines. Full (and heavy) documentation is provided with each quest to acquaint the player with US law and police procedures... these are essential reading for us 'foreign' players.

Again, no immediate plans are in hand for a third game in the series, but Jim is currently trying his hand at undercover work in *Operation Code Name : Ice Man*, a new spy thriller about hi-tech weapons and crime. This is Jim's first adventure game that isn't biographical (Jim has never been a spy), although he is getting 'expert' help with the design. This should reach us here in the U.K. some time next summer.

MANHUNTER: NEW YORK

Written and produced by Dave Dee Dee (where's Mick and Titch?) and Barry Murray, this is a totally new area for Sierra. The game is the result of the Murray's desire to design a horror game which also included elements of science fiction, together with a good dose of humour to balance the horror content.

Basically, *Manhunter* is about a guy's first day on a new job, stepping out into the dark with everything new to him. He's just part of the crowd like everyone else, until the day the aliens



contact him and say: "Hey! You're gonna be a Manhunter!" The game represents a first-person perspective of life in New York City in the year 2004, shortly after an alien invasion and subsequent world takeover. The alien Orb Alliance has taken over all humans, implanted them with tracking devices and ordered them to wear brown robes, forbidding them to speak to other humans under pain of death.

What really sets this apart from other Sierra adventures is the ability to switch from first to third person perspective as you survey accurate maps of New York and have the power to zoom in on a particular situation. The game system is, however, more complex than we have come to expect from Sierra and may take some time to come to terms with.

A sequel to the New York scenario is planned, this being provisionally entitled *Manhunter: San Francisco*. Not much is known at this stage as to the actual content of the new game, but the famous Golden Gate Bridge has been mentioned as one of the main links from San Francisco to the rest of the world.

GOLD RUSH!

This is the very latest 'new' offering from Sierra. As the company has made its home in the gold country of California, intensive research and

much hard work went into making *Gold Rush!* as exciting and historically accurate as the actual events of that era.

Written by Ken and Douglas McNeill, the game recreates the great gold rush of 1849, immersing the players in the trials and tribulations of American pioneers that crossed the continental United States in search of wealth and fortune.

Gold Rush! is designed as an entertainment product, yet in the process of playing the game, one can't help but get a history lesson. It will be a full 5-disk simulation with three completely different voyages to the gold country, each with unique obstacles and perils.

Future plans

(Rumoured or otherwise)

Sierra's first true fantasy role playing game since *Ultima* - provisionally entitled *Hero's Quest* - promises to be what 3-D animated adventure was to interactive fiction. It has been designed by accomplished dungeon-master Lori Ann Cole and is expected to produce an RPG as you've never seen it before.

The second 'snippet' regards a new co-managed production between Roberta Williams and U.S.T.V. scriptwriter Jackie Austin, which carries the working title of *Murder On The Southern Quarter*. This is reputed to be a 'period piece' set in the age of illegal booze. We are promised that the graphics will have the true 'look' of that period in order to really set the tone of the game.

So that about wraps it up for the past, present and future of Sierra On-Line and from this short synopsis of their operation I would say that they will continue in success for many years to come. And I'm sure that, like all good fairy tales, Ken and Roberta will live happily ever after...



From left to right: Leisure Suit Larry, Al Lowe, Barbie Bimbo, Les Sinclair and Sierra's General Manager, Rick Clavin at a recent press launch for LSL2.

...FROM MY INTERVIEWING I NOW HAVE TWO NEW MEMBERS OF THE TEAM...AGENT ARGENT AND AGENT ATKINS... BOTH QUITE BROAD-MINDED WOMEN... HMMM, I WONDER...

It's a funny old world, isn't it? I mean, just the other week, there I was, sitting in a basement in Broadcasting House being asked questions like "And when did you first notice so many women were interested in adventure games?" This wasn't for a new secret radio programme about computers (we should be so lucky) but for the long-established "Woman's Hour", of all things. Fame at last!

So, have you noticed the number of women that are involved in designing, writing, helping and simply playing adventure games? Far more than in any other area of computing; certainly far more than in the arcade-game field. Which arcade-games or programming languages or word-processing packages can you name that have been written by a woman? Yet in the adventure world we've got Amy Briggs and *Plundered Hearts*, Ann Popkess and *Mindfighter*, Anita Sinclair and the early Magnetic Scrolls titles, Roberta Williams and the *King's Quest* series, Sandra Sharkey and *Shymer*, Linda Wright and *The Jade Stone* amongst others. Then there are the likes of Pat Winstanley, who runs the STAC User Group, did the Spectrum conversion of *Frankenstein*, reviews for various magazines and founded *Adventure Contact* magazine. *Adventure Probe* magazine is edited now by Mandy Rodrigues, and was started by Sandra Sharkey, who play-tested STAC and was involved in the design of the next Level 9 game, *Scapeghost*. That's without mentioning the many women who run helpline services, like Sonia Griffiths-Glover, June Rowe, Doreen Bardon and Joan Pancott and the vast numbers of women who play adventure games.

What is it about adventures that particularly appeals to female players then? I spoke to several women involved in the field, and while all the comments made are obviously generalisations, nevertheless some common factors did start to emerge.

First was that the women I spoke to tended to lack the fast hand-eye co-ordination that's needed if you're going to do well at the latest mega-fast-zap arcade games. Sandra Sharkey admitted she just didn't have that fast co-ordination: "With adventures you can switch off and think, and that's partly why I got keen." Pat Winstanley said the same: "Anything that requires a joystick, I'm hopeless." And Linda Wright admitted that "I'm not really very good at arcade games, but I like to think that I am!"

It's the content of arcade games too that tends to put many women off, as Linda explained: "Arcade games real-

MIKE GERRARD GETS TO GRIPS WITH SOME ADVENTUROUS FEMALES

A look into the minds of some of the more famous women in the adventuring field

ly are very male-orientated. It's always the hero going off, usually to kill people, and while I know that this applies in a lot of adventures too, it's really so much more blatant in arcade-games. And things have also definitely changed lately in adventures, you get far more of them where the character is a female, or where it isn't stated because it doesn't matter whether it's a male or a female."

"I don't mind playing the male role in an adventure," said Sandra, "because you can get used to that. If you read a lot, as I do, then you read books all the time in which the main character is a man, and that doesn't stop you enjoying them. I'd like to see more adventures where the main character is a woman, but what I really object to is where the programmer's assumed that the player is bound to be a man, which is different from having the main character as a man, and you get responses that are very much aimed at men."

Anita Sinclair agreed. "I think one of the reasons women like adventures is that they're not really macho, in the way that the current generation of arcade is. Go into an arcade these days and they're all in the lines of 'Kill the evil nasties'. There really are lots of killing activities in games today, and that doesn't appeal to women. With adventures you're not expected to have any reactions other than thought, so you're not as threatened when confronted with an adventure game, and I feel that women don't like to be threatened in the way that a man might get a kick out of it."

Arcade games, then, are very negative from a woman's point of view, involving lots of death and destruction which doesn't really appeal even when it's "only a game." Adventure games offer far more positive points, though, and it seems that generally women are probably better at playing them, which is different from saying that they turn to them because they don't like arcade-games.

"I think that women can organise well," said Anita, "and that's good in adventures because you can think of

two or three puzzles simultaneously and perhaps work out how they're linked together, and this helps solve them. I also think women are more persistent, certainly from the evidence of the people who write in to Magnetic Scrolls asking for help. Women tend to write in only as a last resort, whereas men will write in and ask for help five minutes after they've started."

I can confirm Anita's comments about women being more persistent from the evidence of my own magazine mail-bag. By coincidence, just the other day I read two letters in the morning's post; one was from a woman, stuck in *Mordan's Quest* where you're asked to say who's the king of the jungle, and you're meant to work out that the answer is 'Frog' because your jungle map should have the outline of a frog! No-one ever gets that, so I don't blame the woman for asking. The man, on the other hand, was struggling in the early stages of *The Pawn*, and despite a clue I'd given in the magazine, and despite typing in the coded clues in the packaging, he couldn't work out what to do, so what was it? Also he was thinking of buying *Corruption*, but was it harder than *The Pawn* because he wasn't going to buy it if he couldn't complete it.

There you have Anita's point in a nutshell, as the man is already wanting to have solved a game before he's even bought it, and instead of seeing a hard game as a challenge to be persistently worked at, he sees it as one to be avoided.

Pat Winstanley said something which leads on to another part of the adventure appeal: "I love the logical and the lateral thought that you have to put into solving adventures. But then women aren't supposed to be capable of logical thought, are they? I like the idea of not being able to see what's going on. By that I mean that with an arcade game you can see what's happening, it's all there in front of you on the screen, but with an adventure there's always lots happening off-screen, both in the game and in the program behind the game. I love that feeling of being involved to that

extent, and the way you've got to use your imagination more."

One thing most of the women I spoke to had in common was a love of reading, and adventure games certainly appeal to avid readers. Figures have shown that women buy more books and read more than men do, so that's another reason for their particular attraction. "When you're reading you can become anybody," Sandra told me, "just as you can when you're playing an adventure game." Pat Winstanley and Linda Wright were both confirmed Tolkien fans before they started playing adventures, so games like *The Hobbit* obviously attracted them, and Amy Briggs told me that "I like playing them for the same reason that I read fiction; escape to magical other-worlds. I love the exploration, descriptions and humour best. The puzzles are merely a good way to draw the fun out. For that reason, the Infocom adventure games are my favourite. They care about the writing quality of the fiction part of 'interactive fiction' as much as the interactivity."

Amy, of course, wrote Infocom's *Plundered Hearts*, a game which tried specifically to tap into the female adventure audience by providing a story that they hoped might appeal to women as much as men. The game got a very mixed reception - as anything different often does - and was only partially successful. Of the people who bought it, 40% were female, compared to a more usual 25% for Infocom games. But then according to Amy the game itself only sold about 15,000 copies in America, very low by Infocom's standards, so whether it was actually bought by more women, or simply fewer men, is not known.

Amy Briggs has her own theories as to its lack of success, though she admits that she's "repressed most of the actual numbers"! She says that the game "was aimed at a new market, which was those women who were not already familiar with Infocom games, but it was not advertised anywhere other than the usual computer games magazines. And I think only two or three ads were published in total anyway. It was also lost in the shadows of a year when Infocom published more games than it had ever before, and it was positively drowned in the excited uproar over *Beyond Zork*, which came out in the next month in America."

But for the women I spoke to, the game itself didn't have a particular appeal, though it's difficult to separate its qualities as an adventure from its subject matter. It was more of a 'page-turning' exercise than any other Infocom game, and according to Anita Sin-

clair it lacked the humour that has always been a hallmark of even the most serious Infocom tale: "You try all kinds of odd inputs when you're playing an adventure, and you're used to getting funny responses from an Infocom game, but they just weren't there in *Plundered Hearts*."

Linda Wright admits that she didn't even buy the game, and that's a bad sign as she buys most Infocom titles and could be expected to take particular interest in this one as by the time *Plundered Hearts* came out she had already written her own adventure, *The Jade Stone*, which also features a female central character.

"I wrote my character," Linda said, "to be a fairly adventurous female. I didn't want her to be a sloppy romantic sort like something out of a Mills and Boon story, and in fact when *Plundered Hearts* eventually came out I read the reviews and thought 'That's not for me.' I wanted to get away from the idea that women are the weaker, more helpless sex, which is what you get in a lot of role-playing games for instance, and at that time there had also been a few letters in adventure magazines asking why the main characters were always men, so I decided to make mine a woman and make the male players have to think a little bit more from a female point of view. I did get a few letters afterwards from men who said that while playing the game they were starting to think more as a female character would, which they thought gave them a bit more understanding of women, so maybe it did some good in that respect."

Anita Sinclair thought *Plundered Hearts* failed for various reasons, in addition to its lack of humour. "I think she overdid the romance element too. I think there were certain categories of people, and I don't believe that women who play adventures are the same women who sit down and read romantic fiction, so in some ways there was a mis-match."

The women I spoke to certainly weren't the types to curl up with a Mills and Boon book, being more interested in computers, fantasy fiction and the like. In fact they mostly said that they probably weren't 'typical' women anyway, whatever that might be.

Sandra Sharkey said that she's always been used to being a bit of an exception when it comes to female interests: "I've always done things like playing rugby and cricket, and playing pool, which women aren't supposed to do."

Pat Winstanley said: "I don't think I'm a typical woman, whatever that is, in

that I was always among the 10% or so of women who actually enjoyed maths and sciences at school, I just had that kind of mind. I first got a computer because the idea of it fascinated me, I'd wanted one ever since the first ZX whatever-it-was came out. As soon as I could afford to get a Spectrum I went out and bought it, but hadn't a clue what I was going to do with it!"

Linda Wright got interested in computers when she was working for a publishing company as a computer operator, and their system kept breaking down. She bought a home computer with the intention of learning to program in the hope that she could fix the system without having to wait for the expensive experts to arrive. In the event she lost the job, had got hooked on adventures instead, and ended up starting Marlin Games.

Anita Sinclair had already written several arcade games when she went along to meet Tony Rainbird, and out of that meeting came the success of *The Pawn*, and the start of both Rainbird Software and Magnetic Scrolls.

So women who are successful in the field of adventure-writing may not be 'typical' women, yet they also describe another factor in the appeal that adventures have to a female audience: escapism.

"With adventures you can switch off and think," said Sandra, "so that when you're pegging out the washing or doing the shopping you can be thinking about where you're stuck and often come up with the answer."

Anita Sinclair said: "I don't mean this to sound patronising in any way, but I don't think there's an awful lot of excitement in the average housewife's day. Lots of women's lives aren't very satisfying, but for those who have access to computers, maybe playing around with their children's micros when the kids are at school, they can get some excitement and pleasure from playing adventures."

"I don't think you'll get women interested in computers by producing knitting programs or whatever," said Linda Wright. "Women want to escape from the daily routine of housework and cooking and so on. We play adventures to escape, just like we read to escape. Housewives have more time to think through when we're doing all those boring things like ironing. I mean, ironing is so tedious, I hate it, so do most of the women I know, so you've got to have something to think about while you're doing it and for me it's adventures. I think I'd go mad if I didn't have adventures!"

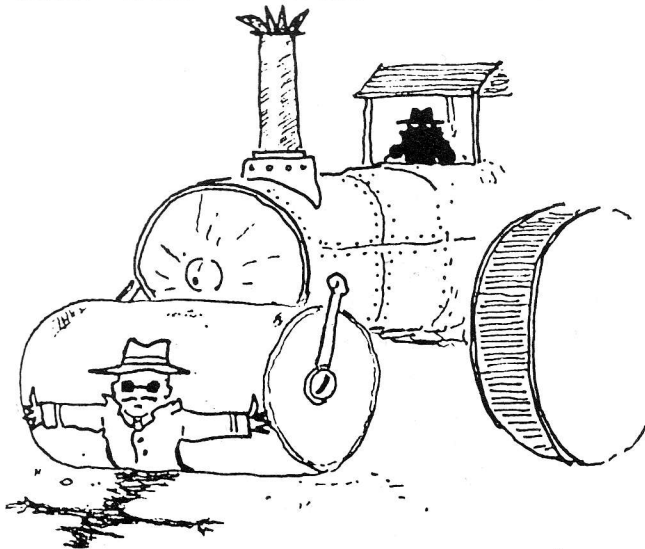
* * * *

...BOB WAS FOUND FACE DOWN IN THE DUSTBINS HAVING CHOKED TO DEATH ON LAST ISSUE'S PROOF-READING SAMPLES.. GET SOMEONE ON THIS NOW!

After last issue's look at how Play-By-Mail games can be categorised, we move on as promised to look in-depth at some of the games that are currently available. The mystery that surrounds such games is widespread, yet for the adventurer feeling the pinch between the latest software offerings, there is a lot to be said about turning to this sort of hobby as an alternative. To start, what better game to delve into than one that is tailor-made for all our budding private eye's out there. Still, it's certainly not an easy life, and this is no easy game.

MERLIN'S KINGDOM PRESENTS

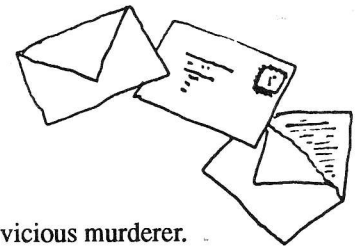
IT'S MURDER



In the age-old tradition of all coincidences, I first heard of this particular game through a totally different channel. When the article on *How To Host A Murder* (Issue Three: February/March) came off the presses, it was seen by one of our members who knew

of similar events held in Cornwall. Well it all sounded more than interesting, so I got in contact with the people behind it. These theme evenings were being held at St. George's Hotel in Tintagel, consisting of costumes, dancing and the inevitable murder, which is the reason everyone attends. Sleuths and investigators turn up from all over the country just to take a hand at

some innocence detective work. As I was speaking to Mike Moseley, who is the man behind the whole affair, he mentioned that in parallel with these events, he also ran a play-by-mail game along the same format. And so, that's how I became John Ewen Malorian, an MI5 Agent on the trail of a



vicious murderer.

It's Murder is set in the real world and this is very useful when trying to decide what to do next. After playing in various fantasy games, it is good to be able to use such revolutionary inventions as the telephone, the car and the Mafia. At the beginning of the game you must decide upon a name and which of the character types you want to play. There are six types of character and each of them has different strengths and weaknesses. There is a Scotland Yard Detective, a Mafia Agent, a Private Investigator, an Insurance Investigator, an MI5 Agent and a Press Reporter. The pros and cons of each character are distributed across six attributes, which come into play at varying points in your snoopings. These are Fame or Status, Strength, Intelligence, Charisma or Charm, Starting Money and Cash Gained Per Turn. These are all fairly logically distributed, so the Reporter has the most charm and charisma, while the Mafia Agent has the most strength, the MI5 Agent has the most status while the Investigator gets the most cash per turn.

They also begin with certain items on their inventory, all of which are very useful, plus a list of the perks of the job; the Police files are open to the Detective, while the Mafia Agent gets two hand grenades in a left luggage compartment at Waterloo Railway Station. Some of the characters get guns, others computer terminals; it is just a case of weighing up what you want and the sort of game you want to play. The only other thing you have to worry about at this time is whether your character wishes to form an Alliance or wants to Diplome.

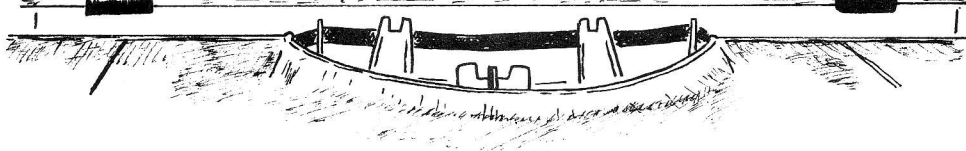
IT'S MURDER

MODERATION: Human
SETTING: Present Day
TOPIC: Crime Game
DIFFICULTY: 65%

COMMENTS: A little restricting in its layout, but still an interesting and absorbing game, which becomes more involved as you progress further into the case. Of course, it also depends on how clever you are at unravelling the clues, but, if you are interested in solving crimes and foiling murderers then this is your game!

START-UP: £5.00

ADDRESS: Merlin's Kingdom, Trevillick, Tintagel, Cornwall, PL34 0DR.



Allying takes place between players with the same character type. You can form an alliance whenever players are in your location. In this way you get information that the other player chooses to let you have and also his or her present location. This does not stop you having agreements and discussions outside the game, but you can only communicate with two players

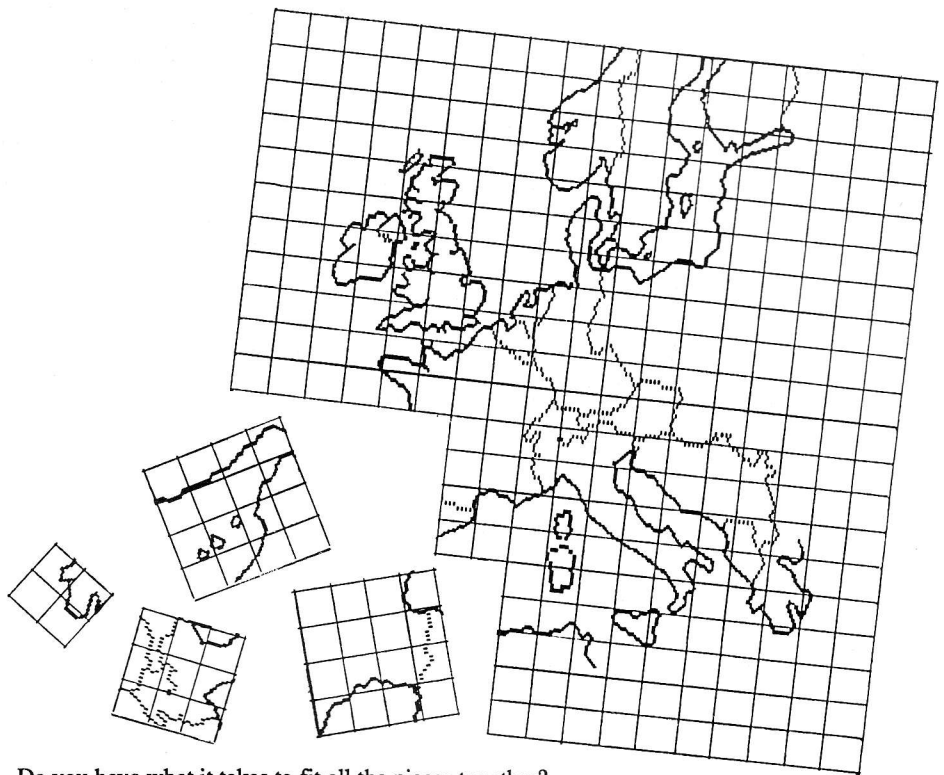


inside the game at any one time. Exchanging information with another player for one turn only is called Diploming. This is used if you want to send details to another player internally via the game postal system. Apart from this, there are no further ties and it is very much a lesser type of alliance. Though you do not have to choose who you wish to ally and diplomate with at the start of the game, you must state whether you are open to using these options. If not, then these are closed from your use during the rest of the game.

The only other major rule is about travel. Tantalising maps of the entire globe are sent with your initial starting position and I would think you will be going on a few plane journeys before this file is closed. This is dealt with simply and efficiently, with the only criteria being that you must have money enough to travel there and a passport for overseas destinations.

After choosing which direction your investigations will follow, you send off the sheet and wait. To newcomers of mail-orientated games, this waiting is by far the most annoying part of any game. There you are, overwhelmingly eager to get on with the game and you are at the mercy of both games master and Post Office. Still, it is quite a thrill to hear the thud of envelopes through the letter box and it is always with great delight that I read my reply sheets. In play-by-mail, patience is not so much a virtue - more a necessity.

The options open to the player in the game are fairly straightforward, covering all the things you will need to do to carry out your study of the case. You can search rooms, fingerprint suspicious-looking items, bribe tight-lipped



Do you have what it takes to fit all the pieces together?

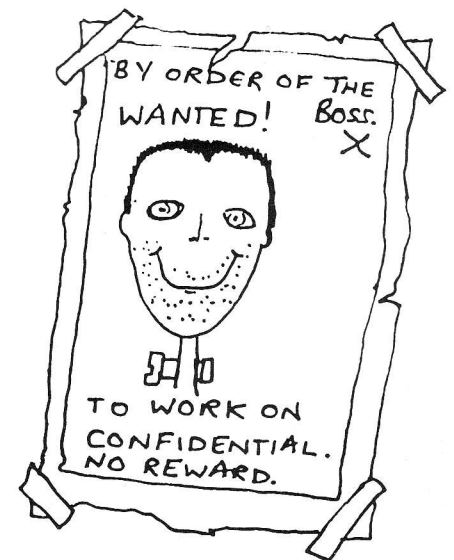
witnesses, interrogate leads and much more. In format, these commands are fairly strict, though this does not overly affect you as you trapse around the country (even the world) trying to track down clues.

Your character is given a loose background by the games master, which includes your recent history and the events leading up to your involvement with the murder case. This leaves the actual playing open to you, but does give you a comfortable niche in which to develop. But role-players beware. This is not a role-playing game and the emphasis is placed upon the task of solving the crime rather than actually building yourself up to be the new Sherlock Holmes. In the end, it will all come down to taste; if you like the problem-solving aspects of the case, are an avid reader of every Agatha Christie novel or even fancy a concise cerebral exercising, then *It's Murder* will appeal. If you are not turned on at the thought of Miss Marple or The Bill, then you will not find that this game holds your interest long either.

So what of the turns? Well, these are typed and run to about three hundred to five hundred words, roughly half to two-thirds of an A4 sheet. They are in character with the whole game and very well-written. When you meet characters, you are given quite a deep look at the interview with them, each one bristling with clues and red herrings. Did Ms. Molloy really scratch her nose because she had an itch? Or was she lying? Did the vicar really have a limp because he tripped on the

church steps? Or did he jump from the window of the victim's house?

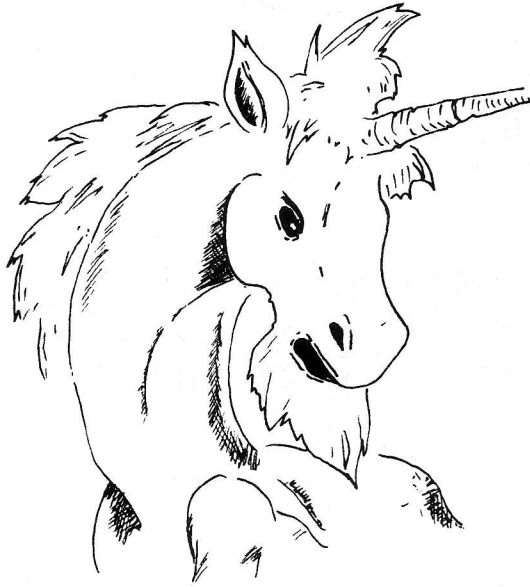
There are also less obvious clues in every sentence that you read. And like all similar situations in the real world, if you are naturally suspicious, you tend to read so much into everything! I ask myself over and over again, should I want to find out what beer the suspect drinks? Or should I be following up the fact that the bathroom window has a crack in it? False leads, red herrings and the usual smattering of dead ends abound. I just hope that I can finally work out that I need to find someone's address before I can look up their number in the telephone book. I think I might have spent too much time in games where magic replaces technology!



...THIS IS GETTING SERIOUS... WE ARE LOSING AGENTS LEFT RIGHT AND CENTRE... WE MUST PUT A STOP TO THIS LITTLE PROBLEM...

The Bestiary File

THE UNICORN (*Fabulosius Virginus*) *Zork II, Ingrid's Back, Kings Quest, Beyond Zork, Etc...*



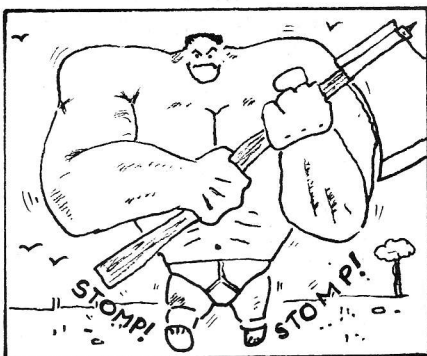
SPECIES: Equine
ORIGIN: Unknown
DIMENSIONS: Length: Ranging from five to nine feet in length (from nose to tail); Height: Ranging from seven to ten feet
DIET: Docile herbivore
HABITAT: Various (but must be secluded)
POPULATION DENSITY: Extremely Rare
GROUPING NUMBER: Solitary
LAIR: None has ever been found
LIFESPAN: One hundred and one years
LOCOMOTION: Four well-muscled legs
REPRODUCTION: No one has ever seen them mate
MATING SEASON: Unknown (Spring?)
SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR: Loners
COMMUNICATION: Nickering
INTELLIGENCE: Above average to very intelligent (they show surprising intelligence at times)

Unicorns are said to be the most secretive of all animals that Adventurers see on their travels around the many different realms that exist for them to explore. At least if there are any other creatures more secretive, no one has reported them yet. These beasts are snow white, with silk-like manes and are the epitome of all horsekind. They are magnificent animals to behold (when anyone can get the chance), but their most startling quality is the twisted horn that rises from the middle of their forehead. So the fokelorists say, this horn is a proof against poison and also a ward against evil, for the Unicorn is inherently good and the paramount of truth and beauty. Only virgin maidens are said to be able to touch or ride them. These creatures are incredibly shy and solitary and hide away in the midst of the thickest woodlands, the most uninhabited places and are rarely seen. They enjoy their own company and seem to disappear to raise their own offspring, for no one has ever reported seeing family groups or youngsters. There are rumours circulating though of a plane where all the unicorns live in great numbers, but this is being poo-pooed by anyone with anything even closely resembling intelligence (as such things usually are).

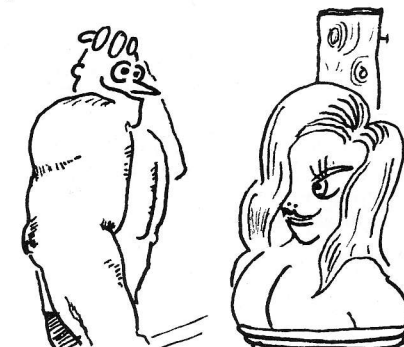
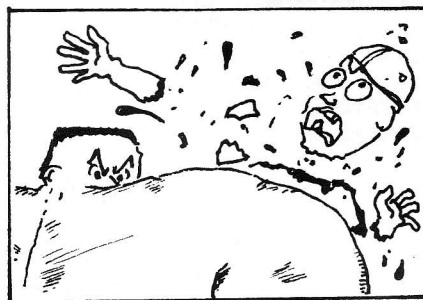
Unicorns are useful to the average Adventurer for a number of different reasons. If tamed, they make the most amazing steeds, they are strong and can out-pace the fastest horse. Trying to catch and tame these beasts is very difficult and many an Adventurer has been scowered on an enraged Unicorn's horn or trampled beneath their hooves. It is best to lure them into a trap of some sort, but usually this trap is woven from magic and spells; definitely the safest way to get a Unicorn on your side if you are not a virgin maiden (and let's face it, who is?), is to charm it.

"OH NO! IT'S BIXBY THE BARBARIAN!" By Rob.

"Go away. I'm a hermit."



"Halt traitor!"

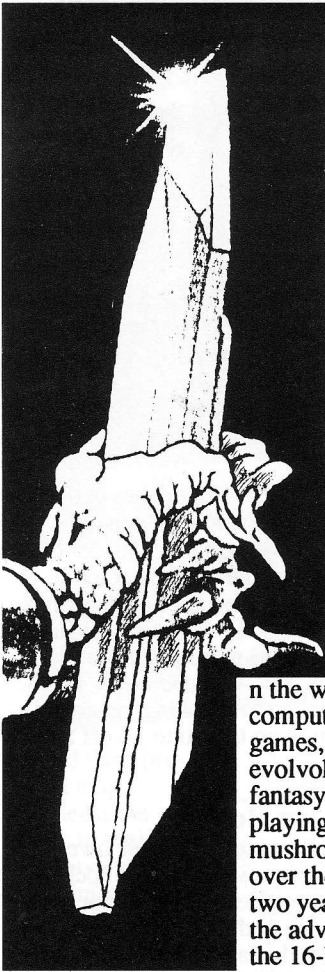


"Wait - I have a fabulous quest for you..."
 >Heh, stop! This is a role-playing game...

"Hello! I'm Bixby... What's your name?"
 >I don't understand that question.

Oh well - so much for role-playing!

...TREVILLIAN... TREVILLIAN? WAKE UP MAN... ARE YOU DAY-DREAMING AGAIN? WELL DON'T JUST SIT THERE... GET OUT AND GET US SOMETHING EXCLUSIVE...



There I was lounging on the inside of a huge leather seat, positioned at one corner of a great expanse of desk, while a leggy red-head poured me a large brandy coffee... Somehow all interviews should start this way. Invariably they never do. I had been lost in a maze of roadways (that I later learned was Europe's largest estate) for some hours when I eventually arrived at No. 7 Holly Way. Perhaps I should have expected the worst, but I certainly did not expect the man I was intending to interview clad in his dressing gown! It seems that his intensive work schedule was beginning to take its toll. But after all he *was* putting the final touches to a quite revolutionary role-playing game. And who can resist the call of the...

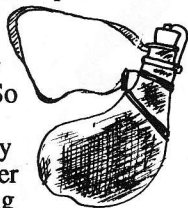
BLOODWYCH

In the world of computer games, the evolution of fantasy role-playing has mushroomed over the past two years. With the advent of the 16-bit

machines, there is now enough memory, enough colour and certainly enough demand to undertake the lengthy implementation time of table-top games.

Visual Dungeons

Momentarily forgetting the problems of realistic (or even semi-realistic) communication in such programs, we are now encountering a taste of visual dungeon adventuring; a sort of shortcut for the imagination. *Bard's Tale* pioneered the true three-dimensional townscape. *Dungeon Master* mastered the art. Once again, the spotlight has been turned on this sort of game and software houses are suddenly commissioning programmers left, right and centre to fill the gap left by there being only one *Dungeon Master* so far. *Galdregon's Domain* attempted to alter its original course halfway through its development and only partially succeeded. So how does *Bloodwych* fair? A lot better if my expedition into its inner chambers was anything to judge by. The game combines all the usual elements of previous games with an extra added dimension - the two-player mode.



Good Measure

But I am getting ahead of myself here. Let's get back to the basics. The real story of the people behind this little gem is novel in itself. The whole concept that is *Bloodwych* was conceived over quite a few years. Its creator was essentially Pete James. He had seen *Gauntlet* and *The Bard's Tale* series and thought that what was needed was a combination of the two; the playability from the former, the 3-D views of the latter and a large dose of role-playing chucked in just for good measure. And so, *The Dungeonmaster* was born, but about three months later FTL decided that that particular name was a touch better for their game. So it was back to square one. At square one, Pete found *Archon*, the modified chess-like program and soon this too was incorporated into the albeit nameless game. "Little influences", he mused, "were picked up along the way. We kept all the best bits - the bits I really liked - and worked them into the programming."

Dragon

Pete had become involved with software through his brother, who had bought a Dragon way back when these were the in-thing in computer hardware. The initial use was for work on said brother's PhD, in preference to the Spectrum's rubbery keyboard, but it eventually only managed to give Pete a burning dissatisfaction with the available software. Having taken art at College, he began to dabble in computer graphics, inventing pictures and scenes in an ever-increasing passion with pixel imagery. Next he became involved with Incentive and

was half working between the despatch and computer graphics departments. At last he was commissioned to do the demo graphics for GAC and *Ransom*, the adventure that accompanied it. He did some painting for Mediagenic ("The stuff that wasn't purple and yellow", he adds quickly), and about thirty seconds of music for *Alice's Adventures in Videoland*.

Absorbing

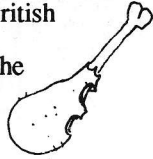
Here he joined forces with Anthony Taglione to form Starlight Software, the label that bears *Bloodwych's* name. Anthony's story is told in that natural way that shows he has unburdened this particular spiel before. "I flunked Cambridge due to playing too much D&D", he says openly and with a smile that I'm sure was missing when he first heard the news, "I know quite a lot of people who lost marks off their grade because of that game. It's so absorbing."

Formidable

Much more so, in his case for he became involved in designing magic and combat systems within the original game's framework. And if that was not enough to keep his mind from his Maths degree, he was also an avid chess player, which is another game that you don't gallop through in your lunch break. So he ended up at Reading University, mainly, as he puts it, "because everything I wanted was close by. London for chess championships, friends for D&D, my new girlfriend and my work at



Uni.". Here it seemed the combination was beginning to work, for the chess tournaments saw him achieving quite a formidable ranking over the years. He was the Yorkshire Champion at eighteen, came "second or third" (he cannot recall which) in the British Championship and was amongst the top forty in the country at his peak.



P

resent

He got into programming purely from the aspect of the mathematical problems that the work includes, plus due to a gift from his girlfriend (actually, to be complete, by this time she was no longer his girlfriend, but his wife). She went back to Columbia for a few years and as a leaving present she bought him a Spectrum - hopefully to keep him occupied in the long months. In no time at all he had found a use for this particular budding talent. He broke into the code for *Splatt!* - which at that time was Incentive's new baby. As it seemed that this was supposed to be a tricky thing to do, he went along to Ian Andrew and asked if he needed any help protecting his software. He got the job. Out of this union, he wrote *Power Load 48* which doubled the loading speed and also was about the best protection around for the Spectrum at that time. This lead onto jobs on *Lords of Midnight*, *Star Trek* and *Spy vs Spy*; "all of which were very successful, thank you."

S

tarlight

At this time he met Pete, and also Francis Lee, and the three of them formed Starlight, which was linked with Ariolasoft. And to come full circle, this lead to the deal with Mirrorsoft, who, being so blown over by *Dungeon Master*, signed them up immediately to produce *Crystal Maze*, the embryo of the later game. So from a game that started out as 'strategic chess in a dungeon' emerged as a program that each of them wanted, having elements of the best games around and a large dose of their own innovative ideas. And ten months later, they have *Bloodwych*.

M

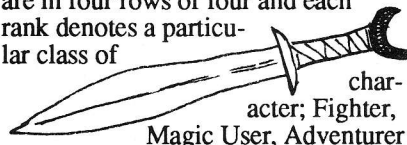
agic

So what is the *Bloodwych*? Well actually, this should say who are the *Bloodwych* for they are an old ruling body of magic users who governed the land in which the action centres. In this land magic abounds and was controlled from an enormous building, in which the mages lived. This had five towers which encompassed all magic. The four at each of the fortress's corner channelled their power into the central one; the tap for the *Bloodwych*'s power. Then one man, known as Zendik, came along and wanted total control of all magic. He wiped the *Bloodwych* out and took all their spells for his own. Only now, after many years, have the *Bloodwych* gained some sort of consciousness and given out a call to summon heroes and heroines to finally defeat Zendik and deliver magic back into their hands. In each of the towers is a crystal which channels its own magic toward Zendik in the centre. These crystals must be removed and once all his power has been taken away, he must be faced alone.

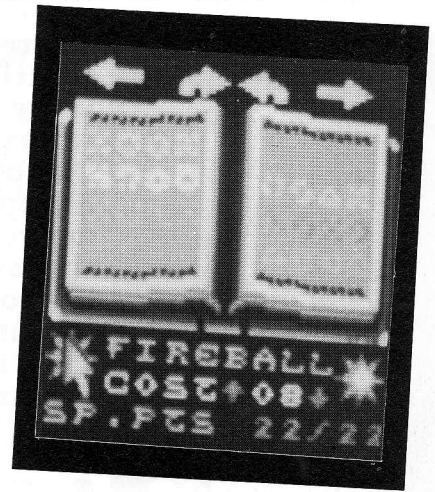
D

ungeons

The game itself has had an extensive amount of development to it. I asked 'Tag', as Anthony is still commonly known, to show me through the dungeons and rooms of the *Bloodwych*. The first screen is laid out with the sixteen characters you may choose from to be your alter-ego and control when you enter the dungeon. These are in four rows of four and each rank denotes a particular class of



character; Fighter, Magic User, Adventurer or Thief. In each row, these are singularly identified by a personal graphic and a colour; blue, green, red or yellow. These colours represent which type of magic they specialise in, for in this land everyone has at least some skill with such arcane lore. Here you can decide if you are going to play on your own, or with someone else. The game is designed so that it is not impossible to complete alone, but it is

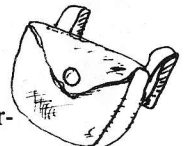


a whole lot easier if there are two - at least, so long as the other person decides to help you! Each leader can recruit three of the other characters from the group during the game, and everyone starts out separately at first - it is up to you to recruit who you meet along your way. All unchosen people are still placed in the dungeon complex and it is up to you to go off and find them.

D

wn Room

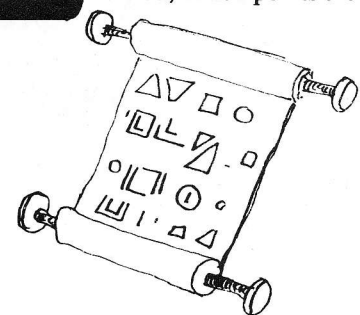
Everyone has their own room which can be locked to provide a safe area for sleeping and recuperating after a particularly damaging encounter. Here can be found shelves for your items, beds and all the things to make life in this hostile place that little bit more bearable. In fact, the whole fortress is designed with its original purpose in mind; the housing of the magicians and sorcerers of the *Bloodwych*. Upon its many levels, you can find a kitchen in which food is always available, an Alchemist for buying potions, the sleeping quarters of the now-defunct mages and many more surprises. Having this sort of level of detail and involvement - a whole living environment and not just level after level of useless dungeon - has taken the most time to perfect, closely followed by the magic system, which is the backbone of the whole game.



S

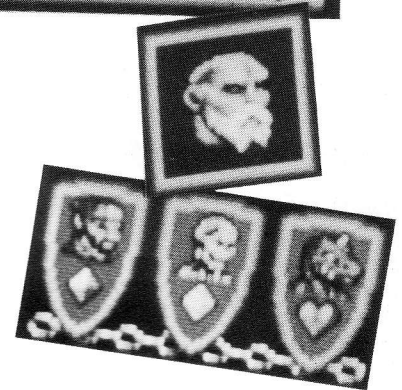
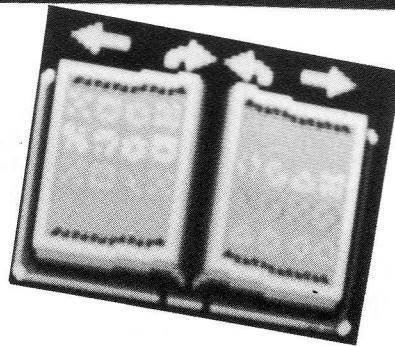
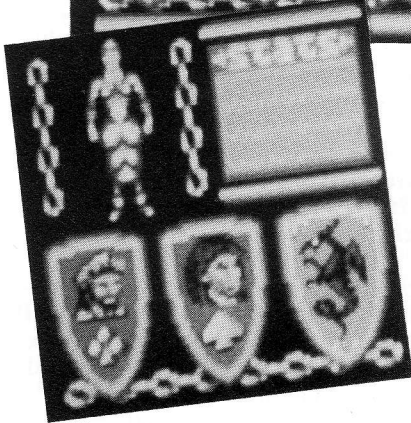
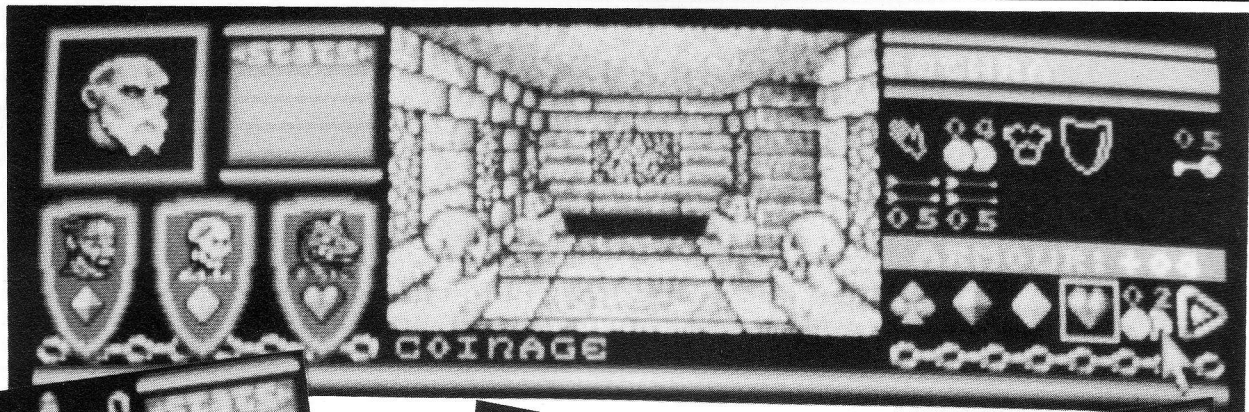
pell Book

As I mentioned before, each character is colour-coded, which points them

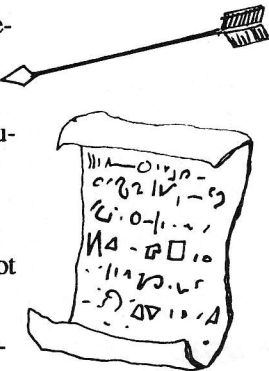


THE TOWERS OF MAGIC

Moon Tower	Mental Magic	Blue
Serpent Tower	Earth Magic	Green
Dragon Tower	Damage Magic	Red
Chaos Tower	Chaotic Magic	Yellow



toward their preferred magic - or at least the magic to which they have a natural affinity. In the character's personal spell book, they can cast all spells not coloured grey (unknown spells) for a certain amount of points. If they choose their own colour, the points are low, but if they move into other colours of magic the point cost is much higher. Practice at any spell brings this total down and also hones the effects, damage, range and duration of the spell.



Two-Player

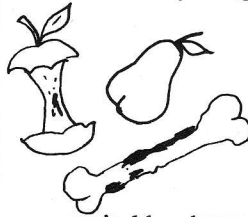
As well as the strong leaning towards magic, the two-player option was also something which was integral to the program right from the beginning. Tag told me: "When people play *Dungeon Master*, they find it easier to play in pairs, controlling different characters, casting magic, mapping and so forth. We thought that to make *Bloodwych* innovative and fun, we would allow players to meet each other, to see each other as they stand together and also to ally and backstab as they ran around completing the set quest." This can of



course be done with an increasing number of games, but only if you link two computers together, which can be a costly business just to get some form of interactivity into the game. This sort of idea is leading towards the multi-user games that at the moment can only be accessed via a modem and require a lot of special equipment. The future it seems will evolve some interesting alternatives. On *Bloodwych*, there is also interest in putting a modem mode in too, just to make the system complete.

Communication

With two people playing the emphasis is suddenly shifted from a standard game. And the options given to each of the players are less than standard too. As well as DISMISSING and RECRUITING members to your party, you can also CALL out to the other player to give them a bearing to help find you (front, left side, right side and rear), VIEW through another's eyes and also a very compact and amusing



COMMUNICATE option. Due to the fact that in these games any input made by an actual player is immediately recognisable when compared with the stock phrases of the computer-generated grunts, Tag and Pete have come up with a series of options that allow the player to influence what will be said, but have taken away all control as to the actual wording of the answer. For example, if you meet an unknown old

man wandering around, you can CURSE or PRAISE him. The resulting sentence appears at the top of your character's picture. In this way, both players and computer-generated characters all act with the same amount of intellect - or so it seems. A novel way of encouraging interaction so often discarded due to poor responses; not, as you would expect, by increasing the parser of the computer, but by bringing the player down to its level. A very refreshing - and workable - way of getting around an old problem.

Puzzles

The puzzles are recognisable from other games of this ilk - pressure pads, keys, buttons and the like - but as well as mechanical puzzles there are also communication puzzles. These include, both the other player, and also the various people who inhabit the fortress. Here you find all the guards, wardens and the other unrecruited characters from the original sixteen.

Ambitious

So here we have an ambitious, but ultimately successful attempt to marry the manipulation of the environment of *Dungeon Master* with the depth of *Bard's Tale*. But I asked if there was anything that they would have liked to have put in that is not included? The answer was an outdoor set of locations, deeper character attributes, more specialisation and animation. Well, at least there are enough additions to make *Bloodwych II* every bit ahead of its class as its predecessor.

TERRIBLE NEWS. STOP. RUMOURS HEARD THAT INFOCOM TO BE CLOSED BY ACTIVISION. STOP. IF TRUE, IT WILL BE A SAD DAY FOR THE ADVENTURING WORLD. STOP.

The Falling Stars Of INFOCOM

Battlehawks treads the uneasy ground of adventure, arcade and RPG and somehow does it very well. It's based upon the role-playing board game *Battletech* in which huge robots engage in deadly duels across weird alien landscapes. In this game, a story has been added breaking the traditional tactical combat rule.

In the 31st century the Five Successor States are locked in a struggle for power and control of the world. As Jason Youngblood, the last of your distinguished line, you enter the academy to train as a pilot of the aforementioned BattleMechs. However, things don't quite go as planned when you're forced into battle with the enemy and find the fate of your home, the Lyran Commonwealth, rests very much in young, inexperienced hands.

So far, everything is as you might expect. The packaging is a different size and shape to that which we have been accustomed, now being square. It's very eye-catching and bears the new seemingly standard 'Infocom' logo in the bottom right hand corner, which tells you what type of game it is. *Battlehawks* for example is termed an RPG while *Shogun* is categorized as Graphic Interactive Fiction and *Journey* is termed a Role Playing Chronicle. And there is a definite difference, believe me.

Even though this is not a typical adventure, it's still strange to see an Infocom title with graphics. This is possibly a concession they've made to the changing market tastes. In an age where computer graphics have become more diverse, colourful and breathtaking, the public no longer seem interested in seeing only text on the screen. They want *Dungeonmaster*, they want *Dragon's Lair*, they want *Rocket Ranger*. And what the public wants, the public gets. Perhaps television is

It's been a long time, almost two years in fact, since Infocom released their last highly acclaimed adventure, *Beyond Zork*. Little has been heard from the far distant shores of Cambridge Massachusetts in that period and there has been speculation about the fate of the world's premier writers of interactive fiction. Their were rumours of takeover bids, stories that U.S shops were refusing to stock Infocom products in the old-style packaging, even that Infocom were not going to produce any games ever again! Well, I can now report that the master storytellers are back with a vengeance. In the space of three months they have released four major new products, namely *Zork Zero*, *Battlehawks - The Crescent Hawk's Inception*, *Journey* and *Shogun*. The last three of these I will be looking at in some detail, trying to determine if the old Infocom magic is still there.

stifling the imagination of children or literary standards are dropping as people read fewer books, but whatever the reason, it seems Infocom have taken the definite decision to change their adventure format. It's very easy to let pictures take the place of words, allowing style to triumph over content, but with these games you feel the writers have been aware of this trap and have made

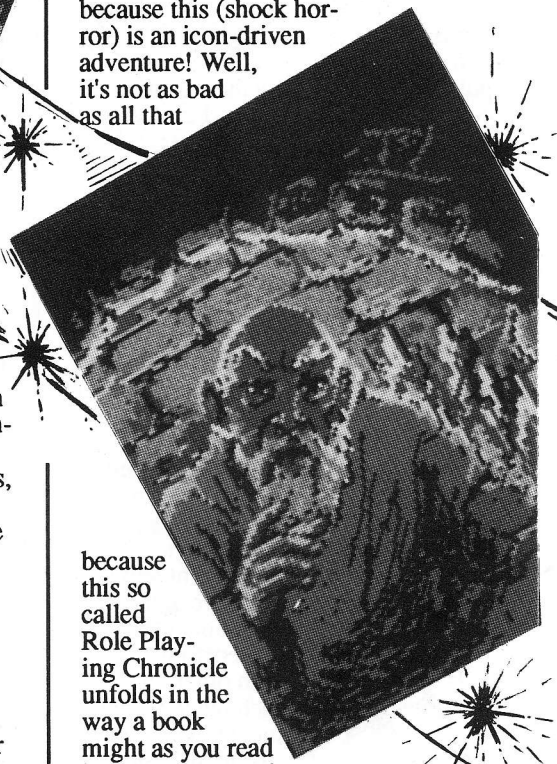
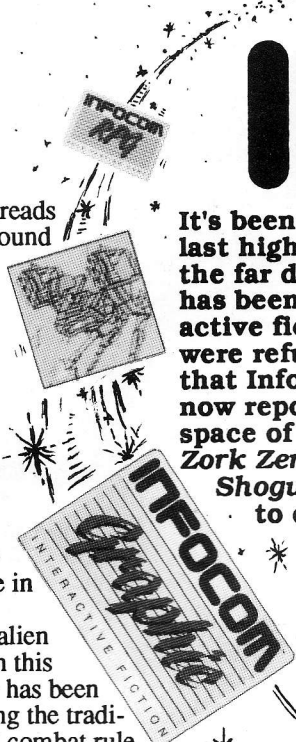
apprentice food merchant. These people do not at first appear to be the stuff of heroes, except the wizard of course, and they seem singularly ill-equipped for an adventure in the wilderness. Their tale is told by Tag and the journey is seen through his eyes as a diary.

Loading the program you find that the screen is divided into three distinct areas. A text box filled with descriptions and conversations takes up most space but on the left there's a window through which graphics illustrate the world of *Journey*. Below them both is a segregated bar in which all your selections are made while playing because this (shock horror) is an icon-driven adventure! Well, it's not as bad as all that

the fullest effort to ensure it doesn't happen.

Journey - The Quest Begins, is something of an oddity. Infocom are obviously trying to break new ground with this product and opinions vary, certainly amongst others in our office, as to whether it works or not. I think it does, but with reservations. The story of *Journey* is simple, but appears to have been left vague so as to encourage an air of mystery or suspense. A shadow of evil has fallen across the land and for three years the crops of your village have been blighted. The only hope is to find the wizard Astrix and try to coax him from his solitary life and gain some assistance. With winter approaching, a group has been assembled. They are Bergon, a strong fair man and carpenter by trade, an unpredictable wizard named Praxix, Esher, a respected physician and Tag, an

because this so called Role Playing Chronicle unfolds in the way a book might as you read it. As each move is recounted by Tag as if he was reading it from a diary years after the event, it is a little strange and won't be to everyone's taste. Yet if you allow



yourself to become immersed in the story, you'll soon be engrossed in the character's struggle.

It's unlikely that you'll solve this game at one sitting because problems are mastered by trial and error and you don't know about some traps until they are sprung. It's advisable to save the game each time you visit the wizard Astrix for example as he's rather an unpredictable fellow (which seems to be a prime requisite for becoming a mage) and has a tendency to do things like throwing himself out of his tower onto the rocks below.

There are no frustrating "dead ends" in *Journey* and every action taken has some sort of effect on the story. Much to Infocom's credit, despite the fact everything is icon-driven, you get the feeling that you are writing the story. On the critical side, people who like to get really involved in the nitty-gritty of a game are likely to be dissatisfied through the lack of options. That's not to say there aren't some taxing puzzles, but the game moves along easily because the available options tell you exactly what can be done. The quality and quantity of the text doesn't appear to have been sacrificed for the sake of graphics and the latter add considerably to the enjoyment.

In a more traditional mould comes *Shogun*, adapted by Dave Lebling from James Clavell's best selling novel. The plot centres around the adventures of John Blackthorne, a resourceful English sailor. In 1600 he became the first Englishman to reach Japan on a secret mission of trade and plunder against the Catholic empire of Spain. Japan was ruled by a council, most prominent upon which are Lord's Toranaga and Ishido. Each wish to become Shogun, ruler under the divine emperor. The balance between them is delicate but the appearance of Blackthorne's ship creates excitement and new possibilities.

The instruction manual follows more conventional Infocom lines with a preface to the story, transcript and explanations of the commands, but after that you are on your own.

Again, the game has a comprehensive range of graphics that illustrate most scenes, but the text is so full and

rich that they definitely play a supporting role. Progress is made by the traditional entry of text sentences and aboard ship the directions are listed as up, down, forward, aft, starboard and port. The places you can visit on the ship are few but it's so well done that the opening scenes struck me as some of the best and most atmospheric I have seen in an adventure. You find yourself doing several things at once like trying to put the ship on course, finding some crew men well enough to go on watch, taking care of the sick captain, finding a food thief and keeping your rutter up to date. If this isn't enough, there's a reef to negotiate before you hit Japan safely and more than likely you'll end up dead several times before you work out the correct way and order in which to solve the problems.

Once in Japan, you soon discover that your ship is in the harbour and that you can't get on board. The hated Spanish Jesuits have been here for years but it's vital that you treat everyone with respect, especially the Japanese. Despite Blackthorne's horror at the brutality of their society, it is he who is considered the barbarian. Quite soon you'll meet Rodriguez, a Portuguese sailor who can quite easily be your friend or enemy. You'll find that the plot closely follows that of the book. The game seems to have been divided up into sections much like the chapters of a novel and at the end of each one you are given a score or rating on your performance.

The graphics are a welcome addition in this adventure and *Shogun* must rate as the best Infocom release for many years. Perhaps because so many people have read the book or seen the film it is so easy to imagine the scenes surrounding Blackthorne.

Despite Infocom's claim that no more titles would be produced on the Atari ST, the packaging states that IBM PC, Macintosh and ST versions will be available. Activision, distributors in the UK of Infocom titles, say that an ST release date has yet to be set but should be in the region of two or three months. Does any-

one know what is going on!

While Sierra On-Line seem to riding upon the crest of a wave at the moment with several new releases and vast publicity, Infocom appear to have been left behind. Since they are both distributed in this country by the same company, I must say that this seems a little odd and a miscalculation on their part. The new Infocom titles have arrived with little fanfare or publicity and reviews have been scarce, which is a shame because I think they are of a higher quality than the admittedly fine, Sierra releases. Infocom shouldn't have to rely upon their products selling by word of mouth and reputation of name alone.

What does the future hold? One game we haven't seen yet is *Quarterstaff*, another role-playing game. The plot centres around the disappearance of the Tree Druid Colony and your party which is sent to find out what happened to them. It claims to capture the mood of pen and paper RPG's (a bold claim indeed) where characters need to eat and sleep, objects have size and weight and even monsters have motives. Reviews in American magazines have been excellent and by all accounts Infocom's distinctive brand of storytelling has been refined and advanced.

Infocom are definitely moving into a broader market with releases like *Battletech* and *Journey*, while still doing what it does best in *Zork Zero* and *Shogun*. Amongst those four games there will be something that appeals to everyone and it is good to see Infocom in such a healthy state. It can only be good for the games buying public and it will be interesting to see what Magnetic Scrolls or Level 9 come up with next. There is still a huge demand for text adventures and so long as people continue to read books, think for themselves and have a desire to fire their imaginations with good stories, there always will be.

James Clavell's

SHOGUN™

...HELLO AGENT WEATHERLEY...ONLY TWO...YES I SEE...OF COURSE I FULLY UNDERSTAND... JUST GET IT ON MY DESK WITHIN THE HOUR"...

And after that brief telephone conversation, what more could Clive Weatherley do other than dash to the phonebox and call Infomedia, creators of *Chronoquest*. and now its splendid successor...

EXPERIMENTS IN TIME



CONFIDENTIAL EXCLUSIVE ON THE TRACK OF CHRONOQUEST 2

nosis, it was originally released in France by 16/32 Diffusion under the name of *Explora* and was a terrific success. *Explora 2* is almost finished, so

expect a *Chronoquest 2* by the end of the year. I wanted to speak to Infomedia, but as they're based in the South of France, in Perpignan, phone calls and written correspondence had to suffice. It would appear that the boys from Infomedia tumbled into games programming somewhat by accident. But let me begin at the beginning...

Floopy

Way back in 1986, young Marc Fajal had an idea that he was sure would revolutionise the French computer media world - an on-disk magazine for C64-owners, containing all the regulars a conventional mag carries: news, features, reviews, letters and a slice of advertising, plus the bonus that it could also include demos and programs. Unfortunately the banks

weren't as confident about the success of such a scheme and refused to lend any capital, forcing Marc to try elsewhere. Which he did and managed to obtain

43,000 Francs (about four grand) from an enterprise initiative scheme. And so *Floopy* was born, the disk-based magazine that sports the logo of *Floopy* the digital duck with large specs. There's a play on words here: the French for duck *canard* is also slang for 'newspaper or similar publication', what we would call a

rag; hence the logo. Anyway back to the story: the duck took off (sorry) in a big way, and soon an Amstrad version was winging its way to users all over France. But there was a snag. Unlike other magazines, *Floopy* could not be stocked by newsagents or other outlets, and so sales were by no means maximised. Solution to the problem: buy a shop and handle all distribution and production from one central office. This they did and the shop in Perpignan, called Allo Micro (which I'm sure sounds a lot less ridiculous if you're French), is still there. Marc built the staff up to a strong team of five, decided to expand into, you've guessed it, games programming and publishing, and *Chronoquest* was the first fruit of their labours.

Inspired

The original idea for *Chronoquest* was Marc's, although he admits that he was heavily inspired by the adventure-cum-competition in vogue at the time, *Eureka!*, which also touched on the theme of time-travel. He spent an aeon trying to solve it (I don't think anyone actually came up with a complete solution), and in so doing realised the shortcomings of the pro-

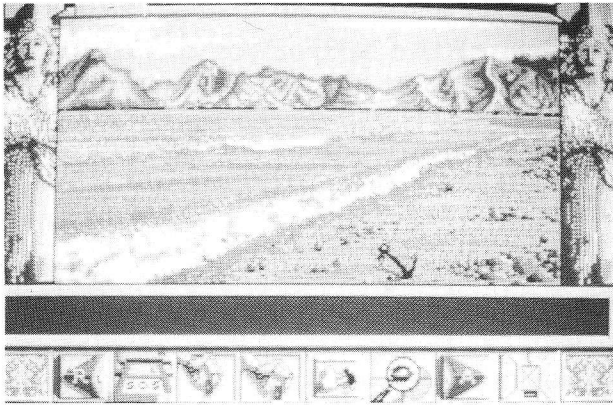
Sometimes you play a game and wonder how anyone else could possibly have anything negative to say about it. You then read a scathing letter, declaring that said game is the worst thing since *Ninja Lawnmower Simulator* on the Oric and wonder if it can really be the same game you drooled over. At other times you hear what appears to be the entire populated universe singing the praises of this week's Gallup No 1, play it for the first time and decide, incredulously, that half an hour of *Bob Says Opportunity Knocks* would be more entertaining. Funny old world, this leisure software lark, and undoubtedly all a question of taste. *Chacun son gout* just about sums it up, which is a hell of a coincidence really as this article happens to be about yet another French bunch, Infomedia.

Wonder Game

Their *Chronoquest* was one of those games that for me fell into the first category. I played it for the first time at last year's PC Show, probably for about fifteen minutes, and was hooked.

Or I would have been hooked if I hadn't had to get back to the stand that I should have been manning. Anyway it shot into my personal top ten as a new entry, and has hovered around the number five position ever since. If you don't know *Chronoquest*, it's a mammoth tale of exploration and puzzle-solving set firstly in a chateau, and then, with the help of a dead useful time-machine, in four different periods of history. Superbly aesthetic screens, atmospheric music, and realistic spot effects make this particular icon-driven adventure stand out from the rest. Published over here by Psyg-





murderer and are trying to return to the chateau, when something goes wrong with the time-machine's teleportation phaser and you're catapulted, once again, into the unknown. New readers start here...



A blue lagoon around you as far as the eye can see. You can make out a rocky coastline in the distance. The

bridge of the ship on which you have landed looks very strange, an irresistible humming blends into the noise of the waves and sea-monsters jump out of the water and cause your barque to flounder.

Quickly you throw the few coins left in your pocket into the supergenerator and find yourself in the courtyard of a sumptuous palace. A horseshoe that you found on the ground will once more fuel the supergenerator which thus seems to accept any kind of metal. Scarcely have you recovered from this trip than you meet a marvellous creature, a woman of legend reminiscent of the sorceresses of antiquity, whereupon she calls you Ulysses! And prepares to invite you into her bed after the most full-bodied of interviews...

Oh, please. Dotted around this page somewhere are some equally exclusive pics from *Chronoquest 2*, so make the most of them: Psygnosis are being very vague about release dates, and no fixed plans seem to have been made concerning its UK appearance. How can they do this to us? Still, when it does appear, remember where you saw it first.

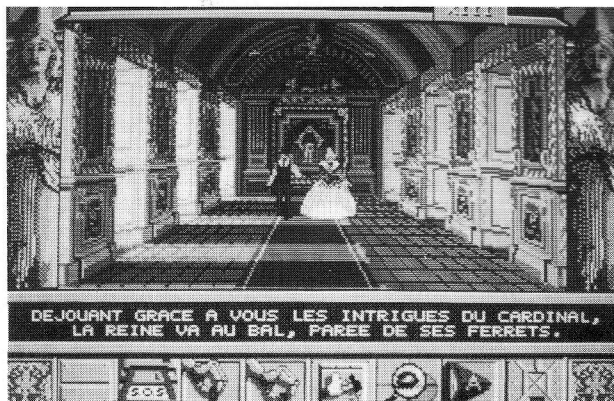
gram. With the germ of a new idea in his head and the determination to improve on what he had seen, he set to work on a scenario with Patrick de Mozas and Fabien Begom, each contributing his own idiosyncratic thoughts. With a concrete plan in their hands, they contracted themselves to 16/32 and had around six months to complete the game, which they achieved in May



1988 thanks to the programmers Jean-Marc Cazale and Hervé Hubert. The result was four disks-worth of epic originality, containing four sub-adventures within the grand framework of the game. And once the packaging was finalised (using a totally irrelevant Roger Dean pic in the UK, but a startling dagger smashing through a pocket-watch in the original), the game hit the streets. A competition was included in the French packaging giving an Egyptian holiday to the winner and hardware to the runners-up, but this was never taken up over here.

Back In Time

In *Chronoquest*, you play the son of a murdered time-machine inventor, bent on avenging your father's death. You suspect Richard the servant as the murderer, but he's discovered the time-machine himself and has travelled back to ancient India, Egypt, Mexico or even a prehistoric swamp. It's up to you to locate the machine, discover how it works, and chase Richard through time. And now Special Exclusive time! A scenario for *Chronoquest 2* that's never appeared anywhere else, and reproduced in its original translation: apparently you've caught up with your father's



MISSING AN ISSUE?



WE'LL DON'T JUST SIT THERE!

GET YOUR BACK EDITIONS TODAY!

MORE FROM THE UNBELIEVABLY ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO SOFTWARE-SPEKE

EXCLUSIVE: Usually a competition to think where you saw the same thing before

ROLE-PLAYING: The menu comes complete with a little button with "Say Hello" on it

OUR GAMES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES: No one will review them

YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS GAME: You won't believe (you paid good money for) this game

REALISTIC: It's 2D, monochrome and has no sound

IS THIS GAME REAL?: The hard earned cash you wasted on it certainly was!

UNIQUE: It's got a different title and we've changed the pacman to a chicken

OUT AT THE END OF THE MONTH: Out at the beginning of next month

TRADE ENQUIRES WELCOME: We have an answerphone

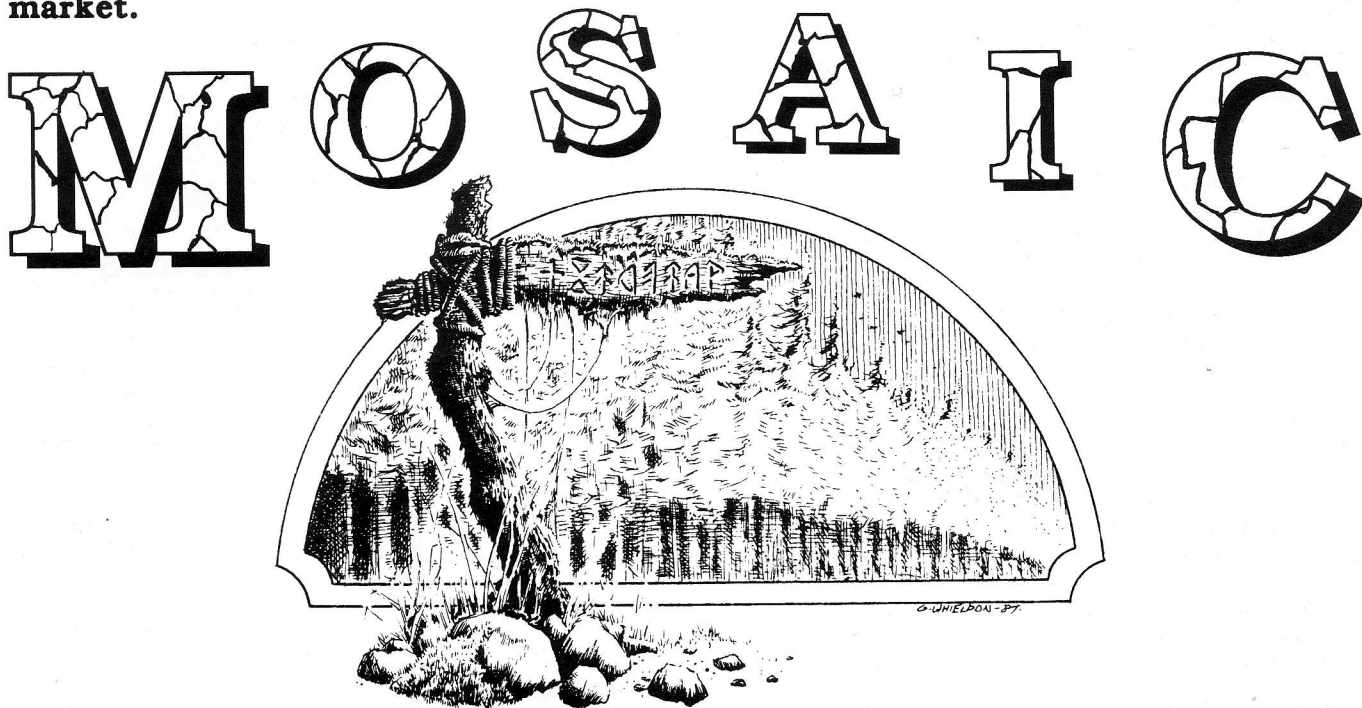
YOUR LAST CHANCE TO BUY: This will be followed by ...

DEFINITELY YOUR LAST CHANCE TO BUY: Buy if you like, but next week you'll see...

NEW IMPROVED AND UPGRADED VERSION: And you are stuck with the old version!

...HAS NO ONE CRASHED AN IRREPLACABLE PIECE OF EXPENSIVE EQUIPMENT THIS MONTH?... WHAT DO YOU MEAN 'HAVE I SEEN MY HELICOPTER?'...

Following on from last Issue's look into the reflection of the MirrorWorld, Pip Cordrey also spoke about the progression of adventure games in the years to come. And his interest is not merely passing either, for he is currently working on a little project which should open a few doors on the static groundwork of the adventure game format. With different approaches to the problem being tested all the time and whispers of everyone's new system being unveiled very soon, we should see some extraordinary changes in the layout of our well-known beast. This could be one of them, for although this article was intended primarily for the multi-user sector, the points it raises are equally valid on every level of the home computer market.



A 3RD GENERATION ADVENTURE GAME CONCEPT BY PIP CORDREY

Introduction

Traditionally, Multi-User Adventure games have been strictly based upon rooms (or 'cells') with discrete inter-connections. When players move they always go from one room to another. When a player says something it will only be directed to people in the same room. More importantly, objects are only visible in the room that they are in, and other features of the game are normally only available in long room descriptions which (a) have to be written and (b) are more often than not turned off after a few goes because they are an incumbrance on a communications system with limited bandwidth.

The Land

The MOSAIC concept defines the land in which the game is played in a completely different way. All features are actually available as game elements, and are defined as size, shape and position. Unless a specifically detailed description is required for a particular location, the game itself generates descriptions of what a player can see

automatically, including processing for line of sight and atmospheric conditions. Also, rather than working on a room-by-room basis, everything is handled in terms of distance - the game is defined on a co-ordinate system of 1m cubes, and everything else revolves around this fact.

Here are a few specific examples of how things work.

Movement

Currently movement is handled by supplying directions in which the player is allowed to travel (eg. N, S, E, W, etc.), and then supplying identifiers for rooms to link one room to another in a particular direction. In a MOSAIC environment, movement can also be accomplished in N S E W directions, but these simply alter the co-ordinates of the player. Therefore, if a player is at (100,100,0) and he types NE, he may end up at (103,104,0), and has therefore moved 5m in more-or-less that direction. Moving UP is only possible if, when the player has moved up, there is a surface on which he can

stand at the new position. For example, putting a player at (100,100,50) will simply cause him to fall 50m (in real time, perhaps) and be crushed to a pulp (1) on the ground. Similarly, walking off the edge of the cliff would achieve the same ends. When the player moves he will see descriptions of where he has moved to, but these are dealt with later.

Looking

In current systems, a player is able to type LOOK, which produces a piece of text explicitly typed in by the game's creator and assigned to that room. The description is then augmented by supplying a list of objects that are in that room (these descriptions may be folded into the text of the room description). For speed, the player may select brief descriptions, in which case a single line of text is produced, simply to identify the room.

In a MOSAIC system, there are a number of different ways in which the player is informed of his location. If there is a piece of very detailed expla-

nation required, perhaps for a puzzle, it can be assigned to a co-ordinate (or a set of co-ordinates if, say, a room in a castle is large) and will be displayed when a player is actually at that location and types LOOK. If a player is standing somewhere, he must be on a surface which is always going to be defined as a feature, so the computer may generate a description for the surface (eg. a dusty plain, uneven grassy terrain, etc.). Also, any features at the location and immediately around it are also described by the computer. Additionally, however, the player can type LOOK N or LOOK AWAY TO THE NORTH (assuming the parser can handle this). Note that LOOK N is different from LOOK AWAY TO THE NORTH in its extent. The former would produce a generated description of features that are in the player's line of sight in that direction along a few metres. The latter would probably attempt to resolve everything that the player could possibly see in a given direction, taking into account how good his eyesight is and, of course, whether or not he is wearing contact lenses.

In addition to direct surface descriptions, the computer would be able to generate slightly varied descriptions based on the direction in which the player was facing. For example, if the player were standing on an area of land mapped thus:

```
=====
=====
=====
=====
===== *
=====
=====
=====
=====
=====
=====
```

where '===' represents grasslands with a dirt track running along it and '*' is the player.

In the above map, if the player were facing north, a (simple) description might read:

>You are on a dirt track, with grasslands on either side.

If the player were facing west, the description would change to:

>You are on a dirt track, facing an expanse of grassland.

Note that, of course, the grassland behind the player is not described, because - well - it's behind him.

Note that the equivalent of the brief flag in a traditional Multi-User game could simply be a variable indicating the maximum range of objects that should be described, or else (or as well as) a variable indicating the level of detail ie. the maximum size of an object before it is described.

Objects

In current systems, objects appear only when the player is in the same room as the object. The actual description is either folded into the room description or else displayed in a separate list. However brief you have selected room descriptions to be, you cannot turn off object descriptions.

In a MOSAIC system, objects are visible whenever they are in the player's line of sight and range of vision. Therefore, they can be obscured by other things, but do not need to be in the same grid square to be seen.

For example, a dining hall may have a large table in it, on which items are placed. Clearly they are at different co-ordinates from the player, but he can still see them. Also, the player can walk around the table within the room.

Objects will still need descriptions and, in fact, they need more than one, as the description of an object (or feature) will change according to its distance. This is the area of programming your game which requires the most amount of text to be generated.

Mobiles and players follow the same rules as objects insofar as when and how you see them.

Fighting

In normal games, fights always take place within one room. They continue until one person flees from the fight, losing points and whatever he/she was carrying, or until one of the combatants is killed.

MOSAIC fighting is rather more sophisticated (and true to life) in that players can move around during fights. There is no fleeing as such, because points are only scored for hits and kills. A player can flee by running off, but the other player may pursue him and, in any case, he will probably be wounded and therefore be moving more slowly. In unarmed combat, blows can only be exchanged when the combatants are within 1m of each other - other weapons may have longer ranges.

Note that players' statistics are much more complex in a MOSAIC game, including height, weight, build, fitness, agility, skill (with each individual type of weapon), body temperature, breathing rate, heart rate, blood pressure,

blood sugar level, endocrinic activity, etc.

* An extra note about movement. In normal games, players can move around as fast as they can type movement commands. In a MOSAIC system, because distances are rigidly defined, players can only move at certain speeds, depending obviously on their physical characteristics. If they move too fast, therefore, they will run out of 'puff'.

Feature Definition

Features would be defined in terms of their position and their dimensions (x, y and z). Clearly, however, shaped objects require more detail. For this, two approaches are possible. One is to build the object out of 1m cubes: although this approach is prohibitively expensive for large objects such as mountains, it does have the advantage of allowing exact mapping of contours, so you could, in fact, model an existing object with ease. An alternative way of defining features is to do so in terms of angled faces, which would then be calculated each time a line-of-sight calculation was required. In fact, a combination of these methods would work best, with an editor identifying easy-to-define surfaces and volumes.

Associated with each of these spatial definitions there must, of course, be descriptions of various types, although these could be kept down to a minimum, allowing the rest of a description to be built up from descriptions of objects and other features around the place.

Physical Forces

On the whole, traditional systems do not have built-in support for physical conditions. MOSAIC, on the other hand, can have several. Firstly, gravity. When an object is placed such that its co-ordinates are in mid-air, it can fall in real time. Other physical forces that can be included are light - since the sun itself can be a feature of the processing for it would be the reverse of line of sight - and wind - if a feature is given a weight and a volume its density is directly apparent, and so it would float and be moved by the wind if, say, it was a cloud.

Does anyone have any ideas on the future of adventure games? Where will they develop and how will they change to suit the games' climate? Send your comments and criticisms to the usual address. You never know, we may change the face of tomorrow's adventuring.

* * * *

...I SEEM TO REQUIRE A NEW FORM OF TRANSPORT... IS THERE ANYTHING OTHER THAN A HELICOPTER THAT I CAN ZOOM TO THE OFFICE IN?

MICHAEL BYWATER

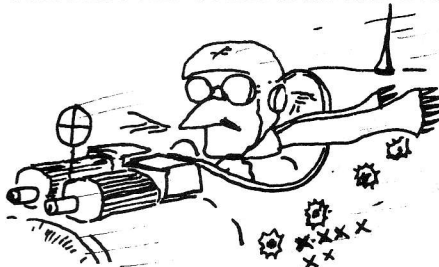
FLIGHT SIMULATORS

INSIDE THE COCKPITS OF FOUR OF THE BEST AEROPLANE SIMULATION PROGRAMS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

I am still, after fifteen years and heaven knows how many hundreds of thousands of miles, a complete and absolute baby about flying. It doesn't matter whether I am at the controls or not. I am totally indifferent to whether I am in a dirty tourist-route 747, a sleek slick Concorde, a rust-bucket freight dog of a DC-3 or a plywood-and-piano-wire Tiger Moth. It is of no significance where I am going, or why. It's not even that saying "Come on - I'll fly you to Venice for lunch" impresses women no end (or used to do, in the days when I could afford it, before the Inland Revenue got me and American Express joined in as well).

Eighteen hours ago I was squashed into a seat on an Airbus heading for France, where I am supposed to be writing a book (and you can tell just how far I am getting with *that* idea) next to my huge friend Adams, who is also supposed to be writing a book, but who is in fact playing rather gloomy my-baby-done-gone-left-me music on his guitar in the next room. We were travelling Club Europe Class. This is a very clever idea. You may think that Club Class means you get a bigger seat and more room, in return for which you pay more money. The marketing geniuses at British Airways have, however, improved on this idea almost beyond recognition. The more money bit is as true as it ever was, but the bigger seat part isn't. You get the same seat as the people who pay less money - much less money, in many cases. You also get the same food. We asked the check-in girl what, in that case, we were paying for. "Oh, lots," she said; "You get a free newspaper." We waited. She began to look worried. "Er..." she said, "Er... you also get flexibility with your flights."

She was quite right: you do get a free



newspaper, a copy of the London Evening Standard, wholesale price 12p. And so does everyone else on the aircraft. Which leaves the "flexibility with your flights" bit, so what it comes down to is that in return for paying more money you are given the option not to get on the blasted flight in the first place.

But, as I said, I am a baby about flying. Neither the certainty that I had become the victim of a marketing strategy, nor the blissfully-disoriented, newly-married stewardess, nor the greenish fish, nor the microwaved chicken which had clearly died of shame could affect my pleasure. I sat there wittering happily, much to Adam's despair. "Doesn't the landing gear make a nice noise when it comes up!" I drivelled, "Look! We're in stratus cloud! We've turned left! That's the VOR at Tour-du-pin below us! Look at that cumulonimbus! I nearly crashed here, once! Here comes the ILS! How about that for a stabilized approach!" and so on.

Flight simulators don't quite give you the real experience, I'm afraid. But on the other hand you don't get the chicken or the stewardess, you don't get the grievance about the seat, you have total flexibility with your flights, you can witter happily as much as you like, and if you have to shell out 20p for your own newspaper it's a small price to pay.

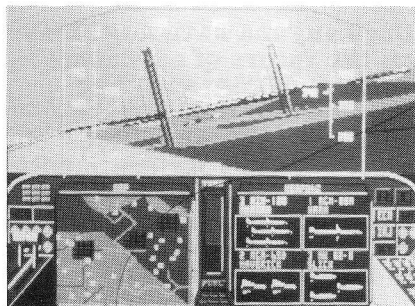
And you get to kill people.

In the earliest decent flight simulator I ever used - I mean the ones for your micro, not the £6 million Rediffusion jobs - the only person you normally ever got to kill was yourself. This was Microsoft's *Flight Simulator*, in which you flew a Cessna 172 - a single-engine lightplane - around America. *Flight Simulator* was, and remains, a fairly pacifist piece

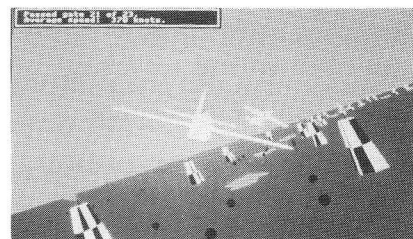
of software; the only concession to the bloodthirsty urges in all of us was a sort of World War 1 sub-scenario in which, Biggles-style, you chased enemy planes around a valley. Over the years, *Flight Simulator* has been refined and improved, but remains essentially civilian - although in the previous version there was a nice "undocumented feature" which allowed you to get into the WW1 scenario at the controls of a Lear Jet.

Flight Simulator is now just one of many. But it is a useful comparison point. I reckon that you could use *Flight Simulator* to train someone to fly a real aeroplane - not a high-performance, complex type like a Gulfstream IV or even a Navajo, but certainly a Cessna 172, a Gulfstream Cheetah or a Piper Archer. The instrumentation, for a start, is similar to what you might find in the real world. The radio navigation aids behave accurately - fly the Instrument Landing System carefully on *Flight Simulator* and you will indeed find that 200 feet above the runway you are in exactly the right position to continue visually for a perfect landing.

In some ways, the "real world" is easier. In the aerodrome circuit itself, we tend to look out of the side window a lot to measure our progress relative to the runway: no need to press the keys to change the view in a real plane, just turn your head. Again, in the real world, as you get close to the ground you get a lot of visual information from the changing textures of tarmac and grass - and what's more, there's something called "ground effect" which, in essence, supports the aircraft at the vital last stage, twenty feet from touchdown. None of the micro flight simulators I've yet seen reproduce this small but important effect.



F-19 Stealth Fighter

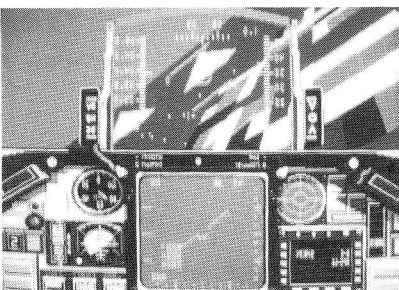


Chuck Yeager's AFT

Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer from Electronic Arts sets out to teach you how to fly. In its training mode, you get instructions coming up on the screen appropriate to each sector - the take-off roll, rotation to become airborne, level, climbing and descending flight, turns, the final approach and landing. The instructions are helpful and if you remembered them accurately, you'd probably not be a complete loss when the pilots of your holiday 747 are suddenly struck down with food poisoning. You might wipe out the craft, but at least you'd impress the pretty girl in the next seat in the process.

Yet as a piece of entertainment software, I found *AFT* rather disappointing. I deliberately ran it - and all the others - on a basis PC-clone with the old standard CGA adaptor and no mouse or joystick, because that's the "worst-case" and a truly great program should be able to overcome those disadvantages. Once you've been through the *AFT* "training mode" you can carry out flight tests in a number of different aircraft, from the Cessna 172 to the near-space X1 or the Blackbird SR-71; the manual provides a checklist of parameters for you to determine, such as cruise speed at 75% throttle, service ceiling (how high you can go until you lose control) and maximum dive speed. You can also fly a series of obstacle courses scattered around the simulator's "world"; and indulge in formation flying, aerobatics and racing - both against the clock and against other aeroplanes.

The strong points of *AFT* are the Flight Instruction module and the wide variety of different aircraft types. Additionally, there are three "experimental" - i.e., non-existent - aircraft: the Instigator, the Samurai and the Mad Dog. Weak points? The instrument displays don't change according to aircraft type and, in comparison with the competition, the HUD (Head-Up Display, which puts flight instrumentation on the aircraft windshield in front of your eyes) are almost non-existent. The documentation is scanty, too, leading me to wonder how much confidence Electronic Arts have in the program.



F-16 Falcon

All -in-all, *AFT* is a reasonable introduction to flying simulators, but lacks a continued challenge and might get dull-ish after a while.

F-19 Stealth Fighter from MicroProse is a different kettle of fish altogether. For a start, the documentation is just about the best I have seen for any entertainment software. There's a 200-page manual covering everything from flight procedures to stealth technology; there are maps and charts of Libya, the Persian Gulf and more; there is everything you could want, which also means plenty to read in bed. (This is what *real* pilots do : they read flight manuals in bed.) What's more, MicroProse not only have an ex-fighter pilot as corporate top banana, they have made their name in military fighter simulations like *F-15 Strike Eagle*, in 1984 veteran - and it shows. *F-19* is the best thing they have done, which also means that it is among the best things that anyone has done.

What is particularly astonishing is that *F-19's* designers designed their simulated stealth fighter - using only non-classified sources - well before the US Department of Defense actually acknowledged the existence of the F-117A - a genuine Official Secret. The differences between MicroProse's brilliant piece of deduction and the "real thing" are few. The F-117A can't operate off carriers; it has a positive wing dihedral ; and a V-tail rather than *F-19's* A-tail. But that's about it: all the other anti-radar stealth technology is there.

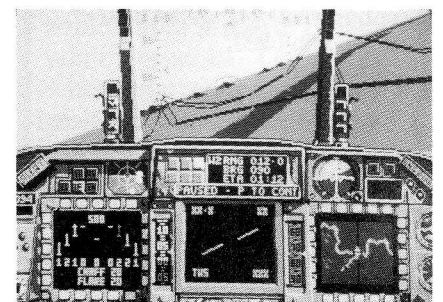
This thing is not easy to fly, but on the other hand it is manageable and once you have the hang of it, the F-19 behaves well. The *real* challenge lies in the complex, properly-simulated missions you fly. Controlling the aeroplane is merely part of it : *F-19* is probably the most *strategically* challenging FS I have yet encountered, and to get the most out of it you will have read, re-read and re-read again all the manuals and documents. By the end of the process, though, you might not be able to fly an F-117A, but you will certainly have a knowledge of stealth operations approaching that of a USAF professional.

Even on the bog-standard PC, *F-19's* graphics - real 3-D, of course, on-screen maps and briefing charts, and a complex, precisely-implemented cockpit - are more than acceptable, with EGA or better, they are knockout. This is a professional, challenging piece of software, and one which, I would guess, would keep you occupied - indeed, preoccupied - for many months.

Finally, two simulations of the General Dynamics F-16 Falcon , *Falcon* from Spectrum HoloByte, and *F-16 Combat Pilot* from Digital Integration. The F-16 is an interesting aeroplane to simulate, simply because it is (insofar as anything can be) the modern US equivalent, of say, the Spitfire. Although a supersonic fly-by-wire aircraft, it is designed to be used in dog-fights. It's not one of your massive, heavyweight interceptors with a 100-mile kill range and all-weather capabilities; it's a sort of airborne Harley-Davidson, a fair-weather, single-operator, get-in-close-and-knock-'em-down machine, proven in real combat. An idea of what they had in mind when they built the F-16 is given by the fact that it carries no onboard night-reconnaissance equipment : you have to sling a special pod from the belly pylon, and in return you have to give up some firepower.

There's not a whole lot to choose between *Falcon* and *F-16*. Both offer you training missions, increasing levels of 'realism' in combat, and a series of offensive and defensive sorties to choose from. Not surprisingly, the cockpit environment is almost identical in both cases, except that *F-16* has an extremely tempting attitude indicator ('Artificial Horizon') which I can't wait to see in real life - a sort of revolving doughnut which keeps an accurate sky/ground aspect ratio whatever your flight attitude and recognise, when, at the top of a loop or halfway round a slow roll, your AH doesn't tell you anything particularly helpful at all. Choosing between them depends what you want. *Falcon* has the better documentation, *F-16* is more interesting ground environments; but really it would be invidious to make a clear choice. Both are good value, both will keep you enthralled for a long time (though perhaps not quite as long as *F-19*) ; perhaps it would be simplest just to toss a coin.

But whichever one you choose, do choose at least one. I guarantee that this level of FS excellence will keep you coming back long after you've solved the latest adventure or lost the newest arcade game behind the sofa.



F-16 Combat Pilot

...AH, THE PERSONNEL FILE... A LITTLE SANITY AMONGST ALL THE MAYHEM... TREVILLIAN, WAKE CANNON UP AND READY HIM FOR SOME INTERVIEWING...

Of course, internationally renowned mega-stars are very wary about giving interviews which may highlight their personal lives, but Agent Cannon is up to any assignment, however impossible. Posing as a fresh-faced reporter working on the fictitious *Teen Scene* magazine, he did manage to grab a few seconds with the exclusive, elusive and reclusive...

LEISURE SUIT LARRY

THE PERSONNEL FILE PRESENTS AN INTERVIEW WITH A SELF-CONFESSED WALLY



We met in the seediest bar I have ever had the misfortune to be in. The place was called Al's. It should have been Alison's, but half the neon had fallen off. The air was thick with smoke and all eyes turned as I entered. A very pregnant silence followed, which wasn't really surprising seeing that the flowered lavender smock I was wearing was only a size 10. I scratched my wig and pulled out a small mirror from my handbag. At least my lipstick hadn't smudged when those muggers had jumped me in the subway. I was just reliving my trepidations that this undercover operation was not the best of Trevillian's plans, when I saw Mr. Laffer leaning against the bar, his plaid suit open to the navel, trying to sip his champagne without sticking the little umbrella in his eye. Well, this was it. Taking a deep breath I strode around the pool table and straight up to the man I had come to interview...

AC: Good evening, Mr Laffer. I am Tracey from *Teen Scene* magazine. I will not take much of your time. Like the suit. Very... trendy. No thank you, I don't drink on the job.
LL: (raised eyebrows)
AC: Hmm... Well, let's get on with the questions, shall we. What kind of music do you like?
LL: Elevator.
AC: Favourite drink?
LL: Vodka and prune juice. Where I come from they call that a Straight Shooter.
AC: Do you have an ideal car?
LL: London taxi.
AC: I see. We always see you in your more adventurous activities, but never working. Do you have a permanent occupation?

LL: I'm a Travelling Software Salesman. That's why I don't have to work.
AC: Well, with so much time on your hands, do you have any hobbies, pastimes or favourite activities?

LL: Failing with women seems to take up most of my spare time.
AC: Not that *Teen Scene* is a computer games magazine or anything, but I must ask; do you play computer games?

LL: Only those written by Al Lowe.

AC: Ah, I see. So what, in your opinion Larry, would constitute the perfect holiday?

LL: Getting to first base.

AC: Who, then, are your role-models and heroes?

LL: Dan Quayle is my role-model, Denis Thatcher my hero.

AC: Your favourite films and on-screen goddesses?

LL: My favourite film is 'Better Hygiene Through Proper Dental Care'. My on-screen goddess is Momma from 'Throw Momma From The Train'.

AC: (leaning ever-so-slightly closer) Now I must make a confession. I am not Tracey of *Teen Scene*, but really Agent Cannon working undercover for *CONFIDENTIAL* magazine.

So let's drop all these nice girlie questions and get on with the dirt. I mean, the sort of questions our readers *really* want to hear. Like what do you wear in bed?

LL: Cologne.

AC: Hmm... that didn't ruffle you. Well, okay, where do you get all your really sexy clothes? Do you have a designer?

LL: When in America I use L.L. Bean, but when holidaying over here I always visit your exclusive fashion houses like Oxfam and The Salvation Army.

AC: I see. Where do you hang out?



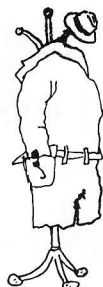
Is there anywhere I could go to get some action?

LL: The only real action is at a computer near you!

AC: No, you know... women and such-like?

LL: Play my next adventure and find out!

AC: Now, to come clean with you Larry, I'm a bit of a no-hoper with chicks. Could you share some of your vast experience of how





to score with women? I mean, firstly, what is your idea of the perfect woman? Topless, right?

LL: No, it's anyone who'll have me.

AC: Well perhaps it's the things that you say. Do you have any infallible chat-up lines that you could let me use?

LL: No, but I have a few fallible chat-up lines you could have. My introductions go something along these lines:

Me: Hey baby, what's your sign?

Girl: Stop.

AC: Okay, Larry, can you tell us what would be your ideal date?

LL: With a woman.

AC: And how far do you go on your first date?

LL: Further than I can get.

AC: What do you do on a date? I always get nervous, how do you manage to be so calm and collected?

LL: That's because I'm completely unaware of what's going on.

AC: Do you like anything kinky in bed?

LL: Personally, I'd like ANYTHING

in bed.

AC: Would you consider yourself to be well-endowed?

LL: Yes, very much so. I was left a large trust fund by my mother.

AC: In this age of nasty social diseases, do you take... er... precautions, Larry?

LL: Oh yes, always, although it's usually totally unnecessary.

AC: But if you did meet Ms Right (or got Ms Right in a wrong way), would you settle down and raise a family?

LL: I don't know, you'll have to get to the end of *Looking For Love* to find that out!

AC: By the way, one last question. I've heard you're still a virgin... Is this true?

LL: Only when you open my packaging! It's up to you to correct that, isn't it?

AC: Will we be seeing you in any further adventures? Is Polyester Patty more than just a rumour?

LL: Yes, but Polyester Patty is revamping her image. Nobody calls her 'Polyester' anymore, now she's Passionate Patty in search of the pulsating pectorals. She's everything that I'm not and will be appearing in my next adventure which is provisionally entitled; *Where In The Heck Is Leisure Suit Larry*.

LAFFER

First Name: Larry
Date of Birth: February 14th 1946
Star Sign: Texaco
Place of Birth: Gumbo, Missouri, USA
Height: 5' 8"
Weight: Rising
Colour of Hair: Black/Thinning
Colour of Eyes: Blue/Bloodshot
Educated: Hardknox High
Occupation: Travelling Software Salesman
Marital Status: Changing
Favourite food: Processed cheese (individually wrapped)
Pastimes: Failing with women



BUGS FILE

This issue we continue the dossier on all the reported quirks, bugs and inconsistencies in your favourite adventure games. This will hopefully grow into a useful list of all those annoying little bits in every game.

THE KRISTAL

When fighting, push the joystick straight up and keep the button depressed. In this way, you will win your fights every time!

GNOME RANGER

Try the following for a laugh at the beginning of the game:

KNOCK. WAIT. ENTER. GET ENVELOPE AND SHOVEL. LEAVE. FIND DOGS. FOLLOW DOG.

You should now find yourself in an infinite loop, being continually told about a dog either baying or barking, someone at the curtains and the wooden peg in the kennel. Press <ESCAPE> to quit the loop!

VARIOUS

Watch out for this little buglet that appears in more games than you realise. If you carry things inside items that you are carrying (or wearing), they may not weigh anything. For example in one of the games, anything placed into your coat can be as heavy as you like. This means you can essentially carry everything around in the game. In some cases it doesn't matter what it is at all. Good fun when you realise you can pick up houses, walls, etc...

To add to this column, write to the usual address, marking the envelope: **Bugs File**

...WE HARDLY HAVE ENOUGH ROOM TO FEATURE ALL THE ENTRIES FOR THE DEAD LETTER BOX THIS ISSUE... BUT KEEP SENDING THEM IN...

DEAD LETTER BOX

Full to overflowing, the Club Noticeboard is growing all the time. Keep all messages as brief as possible when sending them in - and remember this is your chance to reach each and every one of the other members of Official Secrets. Unless otherwise specified, please send all answers and letters to: Dead Letter Box, including the notice code, to the magazine address.

TIME	APPOINTMENTS
8:30	AMIGA OWNERS!
9:00	
9:30	
10:00	
11:00	
11:30	We have full
12:00	DUNGEON MASTER
12:30	MAPS on disk,
1:00	viewable via
1:30	DELUXE PAINT.
2:00	THANKS to Agent
2:30	Napoleon. Send
3:00	a blank disk and
3:30	a stamped addressed
4:00	Jiffy bag to the
4:30	O.S. offices.
5:00	
5:30	

HELP

SET UP

by Jon Whittle for the 128k Spectrum Tape

It is the 21st century and you play the part of a merchant ship controller, John Barrant, in which you were flying highly sophisticated weaponry, which you had obtained from the planet Aesculapius.

You docked safely and entered the decontamination chamber as usual, but when the screen separating you from the landing bay opened, instead of being greeted by the normal OK sign from the customs officers, a man in a black uniform strolled up to you and said, "By order of high military command, I hereby place you under arrest for the harbouring of illegal drugs upon your ship."

Your task is to 'simply' escape from the prison (via ship) on which you have been placed and return to Aesculapius to discover who set you up. You must also find ten pieces of evidence and present them, with the culprit, to the Commander on Aesculapius.


For this 170-room adventure send £4.99 to: J. Whittle, 1 Benbow Close, St. Annes, Lancs, FY8 2TB. Or a SAE for more details.

CALLING ALL AMSTRAD CPC USERS!

I would like to get in touch with all CPC users in Official Secrets. Send me a letter and I will make sure you get a reply. Send to: Erik Hagesaether, Bjollehaugveien 66, N-5510 Vormedal, Norway.

Agent Bowers is trying to get hold of a copy of Enchanter for the ST. Can anyone help?

AB-10

PINBOARD WIZARD → 

Has no-one finished Golden Path or Faery Tale?
Please help!

APATHY RU
AT-12

ATTENTION!

INFOCOM IS NO LONGER GOING TO SUPPORT THE ST IN ANY OF ITS NEW RELEASES. OLD RELEASES WILL BE VERY SCARCE. BUY NOW TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT!

Shhhhhh....
Young Adventurer/Trainee Writer/Agent required to work in the CONFIDENTIAL offices. Must have a passion for adventure games and a genuine desire to become involved in the rough and tumble world of computer espionage. Ring 0279-726541 for details. But remember to keep it secret!

I'M A FRAYED KNOT

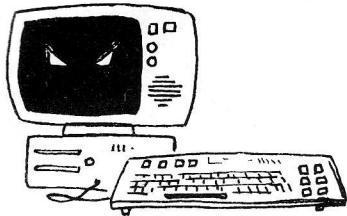
NOTES
THE PRESIDENT IS MISSING:
I require help... I have decoded the first, second and third coded messages at the end of the tape, but I still can't make sense of it. What is the message decoded? Also: a morse code message in the background of the French president's speech: I can't decode it! Agent Hodgson.
AH-11



...IT SEEMS WE HAVE SOME BUDDING AUTHORS OUT THERE... AND WHYEVER NOT... AFTER ALL, WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE EVER-SO-SLIGHTLY MORE INTELLECTUAL...

After June Rowe's short story, a few of our readers have put pen to paper (or should this be 'finger to keyboard?'), and come up with some weird and wonderful offerings of which this is the first. A strange tale, but I am sure it warrants a place in the file for...

C O N F I D E N T I A L P A P E R S
P R E S E N T S



A PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

By David Holden

As Colin closed the door behind the postman returning the love letters which his 'Amigo' personal computer/word processor had inexplicably addressed to his bank manager, he wondered, not for the first time, where it was all going to end. Perhaps, he thought, his friend Alfred's ridiculous theory that there was something peculiar about the machine wasn't as far fetched as it sounded. Colin shook his head bemusedly; he was sure that he had entered the correct address into the mail-merge programme.

As he sat down to continue his interrupted breakfast, his thoughts returned to his first encounter with the computer. He remembered that day clearly: after returning from the shop by taxi, he had opened the cardboard box and picked up the manual. It was at that point that his troubles began.

It's a well-known fact that all computer manuals fall into two categories; those suitable for Einstein clones, and those written for lesser mortals with the intelligence quotient of a flip-flop. The book of words accompanying Colin's 'Amigo' fell into the former category.

Colin, while a long way removed from a flip-flop, recognised his own limitations; his brain, after inputting the entire text of the user guide, alerted him to the necessity of accessing a user-friendly interface; he phoned his buddy Alfred, a domestic science teacher and self-confessed expert in computer science and programming.

Alfred, the one-man help key, duly arrived, and, opening both the user guide and the cocktail cabinet, began absorbing, in equal quantities, the contents of both. Installing himself in Colin's favourite armchair in front of a glowing coal fire he toasted his toes and dedicated his brain to the task of debugging Colin's new system.

Time flowed by, whisky flowed out, and information flowed into the brain

of the great man. His study of all available data eventually ended with his cup of knowledge full and the bottle of spirits empty. Reluctantly he left the warmth of the fire behind and went upstairs to the brand new melamine-covered chipboard work-station which Colin, with a little help from *Home Handyman Magazine*, had created in a corner of the guest bedroom. He then began the delicate task of connecting printer to screen, screen to keyboard, keyboard to modem and modem to phone. "It's really very simple", he told Colin knowledgeableably. "It's a simple process of elimination."

Colin, remembering the bottle of whisky, was inclined to agree. He looked on, however, impressed despite himself, as his mentor connected lead to plug, plug to socket, and brain to mouth: "Now watch this." The mouth spoke authoritively, as it's fingers deftly inserted a floppy disk in the narrow orifice to the side of the monitor screen, played a brief sonata on the console's keyboard, then pointed dramatically at the screen.

The result was slightly less dramatic: the monitor gave a graphic display of what a power cut might look like.

A furrow ploughed its way across the vast acreage of Alfred's brow; using both hands, he tapped out a further silent concerto on the keys. The audible response was such that Colin was irresistibly reminded of Beethoven composing at the piano: his 'Amigo' remained deaf to all entreaties.

A further study of the handbook produced an explanation that satisfied Alfred's ego: "Colin, old son, prepare yourself for a minor disappointment. There is something not quite right about this machine. Nothing to worry about, simply needs debugging somewhere. It's just a process of elimination."

After delivering this considered opinion, the great man stood up. Fore-

stalling any potentially embarrassing questions, and with dignity, in his opinion, fully restored, he departed.

Colin slumped despondently in front of his computer-station and glowered at the uncooperative hardware in front of him. He hated the blasted 'Amigo'. He hissed balefully and crashed a moody fist onto the keyboard. In response to this ill-treatment the screen flashed several times, bleeped angrily, and finally announced:

HELLO
THIS IS AMIGO
ENTER SYNTAX

Colin's startled reply, whilst grammatically all but correct, was anatomically impossible. Excitedly he pressed a key at random. The machine bleeped again, and, almost as if it had considered his previous statement, flashed a new message at him:

SYNTAX ERROR?

A smile as bright as the screen illuminated the room. Alfred had mentioned this contingency, and instructed him in the correct responses. He was now a happy man. He loved his computer; she worked.

The 'Amigo' absorbed him. He spent every spare moment with it. He stopped visiting friends. Instead he created files for each of them on disk. He originated and printed letters to them, and weekly invitations to come and watch him demonstrate his 'Amigo's' capabilities and prowess with her.

Probably due to his two-finger typing skills, the result of his attendance at three of a course of ten touch-typing classes, he made mistakes. His 'Amigo' lost files almost as often as his fingers lost the correct console keys. His mail-merge programme began producing labels with his friends' addresses subtly altered. After four weeks only Alfred continued to come: he did-

n't need an invitation, for he had appropriated the machine's manual in an attempt to de-bug it. He felt that, though the 'Amigo' worked, it didn't work the way it should.

Painstakingly puzzling his way through the basic language, the machine codes, the hidden files and sub-routines, he tried to discover the fault. Colin, who thought his 'Amigo' was perfect, continued to humour him: every week he asked his buddy how his investigation was progressing. Every week, the answer was the same: "Coming along nicely, it's merely a process of elimination."

Colin loathed the thought of spending time away from his 'Amigo': he even resented the time he spent talking to girlfriends on the modem connected telephone. At the end of a particularly frustrating day, when every girlfriend he called was disconnected in the middle of his lovemaking, the idea came to him of creating and sending love letters via his 'Amigo'. It could print and send them all faster than he had managed to get a single sentence out on the phone.

At first, his idea proved very rewarding, then, inexplicably, things began to go wrong: as he laughingly commented to Alfred, "Either my 'Amigo' is a very jealous mistress, or my knowledge of computer programming is not as good as it should be." Whatever the reason, the wistful poetic musings he printed out and sent to Linda began: "My darling Gillian". Sweet, innocent Pauline received the lewd and graphic odes meant for the more broad-minded Ann, who in turn received four letters simultaneously beginning "My darling Linda...", "My darling Pauline...", "My darling Gillian..." and "My darling Alfred..." She was not that broad-minded!

Colin single-mindedly ignored these petty details. He was in the throes of creativity. He was creating his masterpiece, a 'non-stop' shopping list. It was, he thought, a brilliant idea; a shopping list where every item was written down in the order it would appear as he walked up and down the local supermarket's aisles. It was no easy task however. For a start, his kitchen store cupboards were, unluckily, in the kitchen, downstairs; as his slide-rule type brain was only able to remember, at best, two necessities per trip downstairs, he found he was using up stair carpet at a much greater rate than floppy disk.

After eight trips he decided to re-evaluate the parameters of the situation: he sat down, or, more accurately, collapsed, at his console and composed his brain for further thought. Suddenly

he sat bolt upright: "Eureka", he panted, then prodded the keyboard decisively, digits trembling with excitement.

His 'Amigo' responded to his touch by printing out a sheet of paper headed:

SHOPPING LIST

It was otherwise blank. Taking this offering, he returned to the kitchen and wrote out his shopping list on it. He then returned to his work station and entered the list into the 'Amigo's' memory. It seemed the logical thing to do.

Six days passed before the masterpiece was ready: several furtive excursions to Sainsways supermarket had been necessary, for him to scribble down the order in which goods were laid out, but finally, the 'Amigo' had all the details it needed.

A phone-call summoned Alfred. Proudly Colin printed and read out his work: impressive, though for the life of him, he couldn't remember switching from freshly ground coffee to decaffeinated powder. Still, not to worry. Alfred was suitably complimentary about his achievement, that was the main thing.

Colin thought that Alfred was looking a bit peaky. He had dark shadows under his eyes and appeared not to have shaved for several days. "Are you feeling alright?" he asked and made a mental note to buy some whisky to cheer him up. Alfred laughed wildly. "I'm fine", he replied, "give me another week and I'll have solved the enigma of your computer. I know it can only be a process of elimination." Declining to accompany Colin to the supermarket for a practical demonstration of the non-stop shopper system in action, Alfred finally consented to accept a copy of the list instead and made good his escape.

Sainsways at nine on a weekday morning is ideally suited for a test run: all the shelves are fully stocked. As he marched purposefully down the first aisle, inputting fruit and vegetables into his trolley in accordance with his list, Colin began to whistle cheerfully. His creation was a success. He turned the corner to pick up a dozen eggs and came to a halt, gazing down the aisle in shocked horror: some idiot stock controller had re-arranged the store layout; instead of eggs the shelves now contained bread and pastries. All his hard work ruined. His face reflected his feelings.

He glanced down at his computer-generated shopping list and got a second shock. After vegetables, the next item

on the list was not eggs at all; it was wholemeal bread. For a second he thought he was going crazy: he distinctly remembered typing eggs after the vegetables. Then sanity prevailed, and he realised that he must have noticed the re-arrangement on one of his earlier spying trips and altered the listing. He scanned the rest of the printout: sure enough, eggs appeared further down. He carried on shopping. Everything on the list was in its rightful place on the shelves. It wasn't until he got home again that he noticed he had bought aerated water instead of whisky for Alfred. He checked the last item on the listing:

NATURAL SPRING WATER - 1
BOTTLE

Colin was still puzzling over that particular malfunction, and trying to remember why he had changed from butter to polyunsaturated margarine, when a shrill ring of the telephone dragged him out of his reverie and back to the present. Startled out of his preoccupation, he had jumped up, spilling the de-caffeinated hell-brew he disliked so much over his newly printed shopping list in the process. The phone call was from Alfred.

As Colin replaced the receiver he shrugged uneasily and scratched his chin. Alfred had been hysterical, panicky, almost as if he was frightened of something: not at all like his usual nonsense self.

He had then become evasive and mysterious and insisted on seeing Colin face to face before he would explain. They had arranged to meet in fifteen minutes at the supermarket. Colin sighed, threw away his sodden shopping list and rushed upstairs to generate a further copy.

Grabbing a coat in one hand and the reprinted list in the other, he prepared to depart. As he started down the stairs he glanced briefly at the pristine copy. Perfect. Except that, at the bottom, a new heading had appeared:

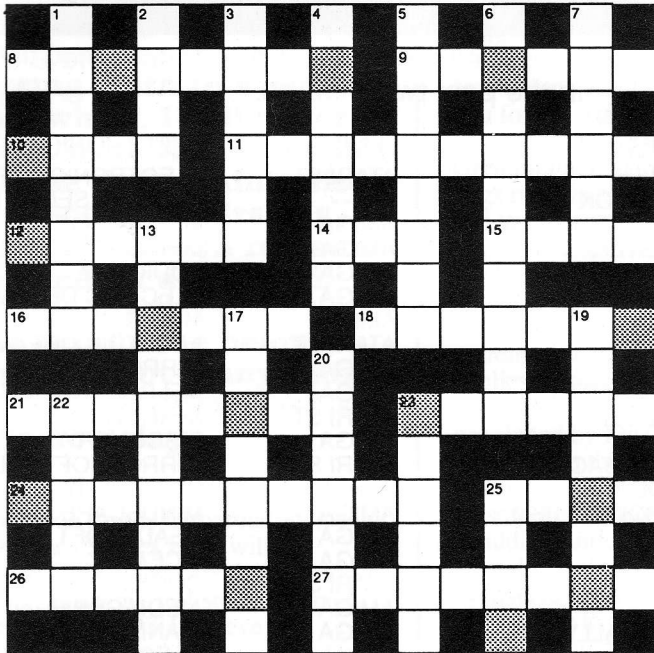
DIXENHAMS
PRINTER RIBBONS - 1
FLOPPY DISKS - 5

His foot faltered. He missed a step. He fell and landed unconscious in a heap at the bottom of the stairs. The light on the modem glowed as his 'Amigo' contacted the emergency services. Colin would not now be told of Alfred's mysterious discovery. He would not now go to Sainsways to meet Alfred. It didn't matter. Alfred's computer was also modem linked to the telephone network. Alfred wouldn't get there either.

... LET'S PICK THE WINNERS FROM LAST MONTH...THEY ARE C. WATHERLEY OF DUNDEE, C. WITHERY FROM GWENT, C. WASHERLEY...CLIVE!!!

CLIVE'S CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

Back to normal this month. Whatever that means...



ACROSS

8. Chart music, you heard, and remixed soul. A divine title! (8)
9. Rocket decapitated filmstar Stuart (6)
10. Capitals of world are in trouble - don't go (4)
11. Enter me in sack-race, worried about the final course? (5,5)
12. Victor - or film-director Michael, perhaps? (6)
14. Neckwear worn by the heads of the Iranian Embassy (3)
15. Entrance found in examining a teak door (4)
16. Least attractive is situated in twisted gut (7)
18. If rarer customised car turns up... (7)
21. ...swap it! For old coins? (8)
23. Hamster turns to nerd (6)
24. Tin-coin tax disorientated: so did this (10)
25. Small illustrations of seedy fruit (4)
26. Part of meal is on tray, we hear (6)
27. Wheelchair-bound detective could provide a strong team for 3 (8)

DOWN

1. Travelling like a mind forever (8)
2. What Larry wears to win . . . hearts, maybe (4)
3. Score 100 roughly at this sport (6)
4. Features of the new Lloyd Webber musical (7)
5. Mrs Thatcher and the Queen at the film opening (8)
6. Ed, green and worried about these species (10)
7. Fifty trees scattered in the Sahara (6)
13. Boring us, he turns and produces soap (10)
17. She looks out for the crumpled linen set (8)
19. "Dear Gene, About that arcade-adventure..." (8)
20. Shoot-em-up will spin and rise (7)
22. Noble kind of arcade game? (5)
23. Food allowance for rodent and headless lion (6)
25. The sixth letter is H, like 'piranha' (4)

THE WIZARD'S COTTAGE IV

By John .

So the way leads ever onwards. With little trouble, you have now worked out that to get past the werewolves you must simply close your eyes. They are obviously illusions - and what you cannot see, cannot hurt you.

Walking blindly past the clammy touch of the curtain, the small room beyond has stone walls and a closed trapdoor in its floor. There is a fixed iron ring set into the centre of the trapdoor. Behind can still be heard the werewolves' howling, though as they trapdoor is forced open, they cry out in pain and fall silent. Turning

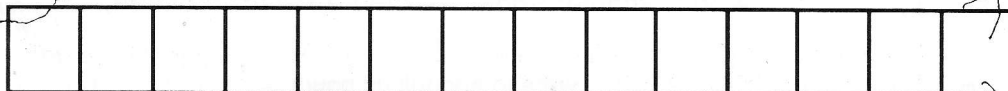
around, your eyes now open wide, you see that each of the twelve half-human creatures now is no more than a dozen skins lying on the floor. Looking around the room once more, there is also a piece of wood divided into a grid discarded by the wall. The grid is thirteen squares across by thirteen squares down, with a sentence at the top which reads: **PASS THE PORTCULLIS OF CLOUD BY** - discarded by the wall. On the base of the door is written a familiar warning: **PROCEED THOUGH WARE WOLVES.**

The floor to the bottom of the chamber is twenty feet below you with misty, wispy walls that sway and glisten. There is

also a chain hanging from the middle of the trapdoor to the floor, where it disappears through a tiny hole. The air below is freezing cold and icy blasts of air rush up from the shaft into the warmer room above. Straining your eyes at the mist, you see beyond into a misty corridor ending in a stone archway, that has a portcullis hanging over its threshold made entirely of what looks like cloud. Standing at the end of the tunnel is a pale-skinned, bald-headed man with great gold earrings and a short, black beard. His lower half, from his waist to the floor, is a broiling, gaseous cloud that tapers to a point. His face bears a resolute look and his arms are folded before him. Looking through the archway that he guards, you see a shaft that disappears

from view both up and down. Within it lies a door, hanging in nothingness and upon this are scrawled mystic words that form two

PASS THE PORTCULLIS OF CLOUD BY
(A Password: 10,4)



columns; one marked **ACROSS** and the other marked **DOWN**.

So the problem once again is how to survive the freezing mists, how to pass the third Guardian and how to get through the Portcullis Of Cloud? This part of the Cottage is combined with the usual crossword above. You can enter the Crossword without solving the Cottage, but not vice-versa. The grid that you find corresponds to the grid above and the clues too! Once the Crossword is completed, then use the shaded squares to fill in the missing word to complete the puzzle. Easy innit? Approach this otherwise as you would any normal adventure game. You have seven moves. Write all your answers as adventure commands (ie. if you think that the way to get past the portcullis is by shouting 'Horace' then reply: >go down, go to portcullis, >shout 'Horace' at portcullis). Send your solution to John Trevillian at the usual address. And as an incentive there will be a draw of the correct answers and the five chosen will win money-off vouchers!

LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTIONS



The winners of the Cryptic Crossword No. 3 were: Stu Phillips of Nottingham, Neil Shipman of Bristol, Alex Spiers of London, Ian Urquhart of London, and David Winters of Newcastle. The Cottage solution is solved by >show water to guardian >open door >close eyes >west (or walk past wolves) >open trapdoor. A few more winners this issue: James Handley of London, Alison Richardson of Tyne and Wear, Neil Shipman and Ian Urquhart (again!).

Well done! You will be receiving your vouchers in the post shortly. As the Wizard's Cottage will finish next issue, is there anyone who would like to see another type of puzzle adorning these pages? Or perhaps you could set one for our members. For suggestions or puzzles please mail them to the usual office and we'll see what we can do!

* * * *

The Official Secrets BEST SELLERS Chart

A top thirty list of the best-selling software throughout the Clubs in the past two months.

1	POPULOUS	AMIGA	ELECTRONIC ARTS
2	POPULOUS	ATARI ST	ELECTRONIC ARTS
3	DM SOLUTION BOOK	-----	OFFICIAL SECRETS
4	LORDS OF THE RISING SUN	AMIGA	MIRRORSOFT
5	DUNGEON MASTER	AMIGA	MIRRORSOFT/FTL
6	KRISTAL	AMIGA	ADDICTIVE
7	SUPER HANG ON	AMIGA	ELECTRIC DREAMS
8	F16 FALCON	AMIGA	MIRRORSOFT
9	MILLENNIUM 2.2	ATARI ST	ELECTRIC DREAMS
10	TV FOOTBALL	AMIGA	MIRRORSOFT
11	WAR IN MIDDLE EARTH	AMIGA	MELBOURNE HOUSE
12	DUNGEON MASTER	ATARI ST	MIRRORSOFT/FTL
13	HYBRIS	AMIGA	DISCOVERY
14	CHAOS STRIKES BACK	ATARI ST	MIRRORSOFT/FTL
15	SWORD OF SODAN	AMIGA	DISCOVERY
16	BALANCE OF POWER 1990	AMIGA	MINDSCAPE
17	DRAGON'S LAIR	AMIGA	READYSOFT
18	ROBOCOP	AMIGA	OCEAN
19	EMANUELLE	ATARI ST	COCKTEL VISION
20	R-TYPE	AMIGA	MEDIAGENIC
21	LOMBARD RAC RALLY	AMIGA	MANDARIN
22	MILLENNIUM 2.2	AMIGA	ELECTRIC DREAMS
23	LOMBARD RAC RALLY	IBM PC	MANDARIN
24	WORKBENCH 1.3	AMIGA	COMMODORE
25	F-16 COMBAT PILOT	ATARI ST	DIGITAL INTEGRATION
26	EMANUELLE	AMIGA	COCKTEL VISION
27	SPACE HARRIER	AMIGA	ELITE SYSTEMS
28	F16 FALCON	ATARI ST	MIRRORSOFT
29	BARDS TALE 1 HINT BOOK	-----	ELECTRONIC ARTS
30	GALDREGON'S DOMAIN	ATARI ST	INTERCEPTOR

The Official Secrets CALENDAR for 1989

A month-to-month list of notable events and dates throughout the year ahead This time we focus on the Database shows.

June 2-4

Commodore Computer Show, Novotel, London

June 23-25

Atari Computer Show, Alexandra Palace, London

November 17-19

Commodore Computer Show, Novotel, London

November 24-26

Amstrad Computer Show, Alexandra Palace, London

December 1-3

Atari Computer Show, Alexandra Palace, London

(If you have heard of anything up-and-coming to be added to this list, please write in and tell us now!)

...WE ARE GETTING A LOT OF PEOPLE'S POINTS OF VIEW IN THE MAGAZINE AT THE MOMENT... PERHAPS WE SHOULD START OF FORUM OR SOMETHING...

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY...

Ring! Ring! -click- "The Man In Black rides again in his dingy cellar room! Another frantic month getting *Myth* to everyone; whew, I will never mock at a slipped release date again. Also The Boss Upstairs has levelled his iron rod and decided on a new addition to my little file. For details see below. Anyway, not many units left on my Phoncard so let's no delay...

Dear Sir,
Thank you for the numerous advice that Chaos Strikes Back will be delayed. I somehow think you may be wrong, as having just studied numerous guides to VAT I believe it is already here albeit in an organised way!

Actually Dungeon Master happens to be about the best game I have ever seen on a computer; it actually caters for grown-ups. The information with the game is slightly incorrect as the Mummies and Ghosts are really VAT

Inspectors with hallitosis. The Sneak Thieves are of course The Tax Man and so on. And we all know what that thing on Level 14 is don't we!

Not so long ago I bought FOFT from you for the Atari ST. On dear, what a dog of a game. It has been returned to Gremlin (well named) twice to have bugs removed. It is still unplayable and discussions with a Ms Linda Cliff at Gremlin has thrown up the following gem. In either her view or the authors (I am trying to establish which) the inverse square law (come on remember your school days) ONLY applies to gravity. Yes, I have this in black and white on Gremlin's notepaper signed by Ms Cliff! I feel it is my duty to rush this information to the Scientific Community, fancy that all these years we have been held back by a piddling little law which isn't true. Actually, if this were so, I wouldn't even have to post this letter, I should just be able to talk in a normal voice and you would hear me. No tongue in cheek job this, she is serious! Well what can you say about a game house that comes out with such a daft statement, unless she left school very early!

M.H. Knight, Bolton.

The Man In Black says: Well I am sure that when Chaos does eventually

Strike Back, it will be up to the standard of its predecessor. Thanks for letting us know about the change in the favric of the entire Universe - it restores my faith in the fact that software houses are a force to be reckoned with! But seriously folks...



Dear Man In Black,
First the bouquet: Issue 3 of Confidential was varied and interesting, and I particularly enjoyed Merc the Congealed's "Spooof Cottage". Now the brickbat: Some articles, especially Pat Winstanley's "Role-Player's Guide", were difficult to read because of the large number of typos. Just a suggestion, but how about a bit more attention to proof-reading? Keep up the good work!

Neil Shipman, Bristol.

The Mon In Bluck says: Our prufreeder has now been sucked and so thing should get betty from now on. Humour aside, this is one area which we are trying to tighten up - hopefully from this issue... Tell us if I'm wrong. And now onto the new section of the Letters Page...

The SpeakEasy



A few thoughts on the state of adventuring, past and present.

Some four years ago, a friend of mine owned an MSX and also had a bunch of Level 9 adventures. I became enamoured of this new pastime to the extent that I bought an MSX myself, little realising that this meant I would shortly have to go around banging a tin cup with a spoon, yelling "Unclean!"

However, all of the Level 9 games were available - and kudos here to the Austins for releasing their adventures across all formats - and many happy hours were whiled away struggling to get the games to load. And many a night spent wrestling with some fiendish puzzles, wrapped up in atmospheric text with a strong dose of humour thrown in for the price of admission. Further credit must go to Level 9 for their back-up - their excellent hint sheets, posters, calendars, T-

shirts and so on, and their policy of cassette replacement deserves a mention.

A couple of years later, when I'd finally cracked all of these games, I found myself unable to go forth and fantasise any more. A lengthy search for further software resulted in unearthing *Castle Blackstar* - which was a fair attempt if you forgive the parser, which claimed that I was still in possession of a steel bar even after I had dropped it in a crevice an hour or so before (a hilarious session ensued where I dropped the bar in practically every location, and could barely move for a multitude of the damn things), *The Hobbit* - which preferred to crash rather than let you solve any problems (an awful lot of beer was consumed in the fifteen-odd minutes it took to load in time after time), and *Zakil Wood* which was, in a word, wretched.

So, the only solution to my dilemma was to purchase a new computer, which I did. It shall remain nameless



to avoid a machine snobbery debate. Now I had access to loads of games, for a price, and guess what? That's right, apart from a few real gems, mucho disappointment. Take *Mindshadow*, for example - crappy graphics, sparse text, about as much atmosphere as Venus and an almost non-existent parser which informed me at one point that I was in possession of "a piece of surgeon", and not satisfied with that startling piece of information, whilst aboard a boat, rewarded my request to go North with "damaged f**k in that direction"! Mind you, despite this type of mind-boggling stumbling block, I still finished the game in about an hour. Ho hum, another twenty five quid down the toilet. Never mind, it didn't take long to load, either. And I only had to swap disks on less than a million occasions. I begin to wonder whether there is some sort of relationship between loading and playing time, after all

Level 9's cassettes took ages to load, and the adventures often lasted for weeks! Or how about Magnetic Scrolls? *The Pawn* - difficult, obscure, illogical. Very pretty pictures, though, but they have no real relationship to the game itself. *Guild Of Thieves* - now THIS is more like it. Yes indeed, a good old-fashioned treasure hunt. Then *Jinxter* - a large stuffed bird that you could eat at Christmas. Next, *Corruption* - an ugly game. And, finally, *Fish!* - the one that got away, apparently. Excellent, apart from the bug involving the cassettes, of which more anon.

Infocom - a large range, some of which will not suit everybody's taste, including mine, but clearly the leader of the field - great text, logical puzzles, terrific atmosphere, humour and a very obliging parser. Splendid packaging, too. The latest of their massive range haven't been released on as many formats as usual, although by all reports the games aren't quite up to the standard we've come to expect. This is a worrying trend. For the time being though, there are an awful lot of games out there, and there would be more if their distributors got their act together.

And what of the old enemy, Level 9? Disappointing of late, I'm afraid. Which brings us onto the subject of parsers, bugs and graphics: now perhaps the bells and whistles added to modern adventures do little to enhance the gameplay. The fact that quite a few of these games have scooped all sorts of awards makes it apparent that I'm completely out of touch with unreality. Nevertheless, being able to plant a pot plant in a plant pot doesn't really light my candle, speaking of which, I don't object at all to opening a matchbox, taking a match, lighting it and then lighting the candle with it (without scoring any points for doing so). It appears to be perfectly logical to me - it's what you would do if you were really in that situation. Ditto opening doors - congratulations to Magnetic Scrolls here, for the scenario in *Fish!* where carelessly leaving a door ajar is crucial to the plot, and the burglary which occurs because of this leads to the acquisition of an important item. Also, there's nothing wrong with simple verb/noun input. I'd hazard a guess that most game players aren't typists and accordingly keep their comments brief. Harking back to the aforementioned *Castle Blackstar*, the input EXAM STRA would be rewarded with a description of a stradivarius violin. The conclusions we can draw from this are: 1) the parser only reads the first few letters of a word, 2) the player, although concerned about the quality of the descriptions, doesn't mind abbreviating his commands,

thereby speeding the game up and also reducing the chance of spelling mistakes (sic). I'm sure all of us are heartily sick of typing Pterodactyl, Stradivarius, or whatever, so what we really need is a parser that understands typos! To labour the point somewhat, we may deduce that input is nowhere near as important as the content of the text, if the spelling is sloppy (I once found myself near "a small steam flowing..."), the grammar bad, the descriptions poor, etc. then the atmosphere suffers. OK, we're dealing with a fantasy world here, but it should maintain its own inherent logic, including its geography, ie. when you go south you ought to end up in the same place that you came north from, unless the text clearly states that the road, passage, tunnel or whatever, bends, or forks. Also, when going south in a pub the screen should definitely not fill up with the word "and", which neatly leads us to bugs.

Angry of Scunthorpe would probably say that it's a disgrace to pay £24.95 for something that doesn't behave itself properly. To be fair, there's no way that anyone can guarantee a 100% bug-free program with deadline doom waiting in the wings. However, it is not unreasonable for the potential purchaser of any work of interactive fiction (to use the current generic term) to expect thorough playtesting before the product's release. The biggest culprits here are Level 9 and Magnetic Scrolls, who appear to be too keenly aware of their rivalry to delay release of a new game and a little too precious about their programs to allow a lowly outsider the opportunity to give their games a damn good thrashing. Gissa job! I know the question of pre-release piracy could be raised here, but I'll leave that argument for another day.

And now, the way of the future. Graphics. Graphics appear to be the Great White Elephant, I beg your pardon, Hope here. They are an absolute must, apparently, if you wish to attract the up-and-coming adventurer, they're usually static, often attractive, and completely irrelevant. Now I don't mind them being there, but the items in the picture aren't always in the text, and vice-versa. Or how about the latest Graphics/Mouse adventures, where you have to go through the screen seemingly pixel by pixel, clicking away until your mouse is knackered before eliciting any response: needle in a haystack, or what? My poor wee mouse still hasn't recovered from *Dungeon Master* yet, but that isn't, strictly speaking, an adventure.

Sierra have at least shown promise - a sprite to satisfy joystick wagglers;

items in the picture you can actually look at, examine, manipulate, open or close, take, drop, wear and so forth; text input and response; reasonable plots; music and a fair smattering of humour. I defy anyone not to laugh at the disco scene in *Leisure Suit Larry*. Unfortunately the graphics are perhaps a little too simplistic to satisfy those of a digital persuasion, there is definitely a lot of gameplay. A fault common to all graphical games is the frustrating delay while the next picture is accessed from disk. Yes, I know that I used to have to wait ages for the games themselves to load in the good old days. That was part of the fun. The unadulterated thrill when the message FOUND:ADVENT appeared on the screen has rarely been surpassed. This leads to my final observation.

The Level 9 adventures I originally played were crammed into 32k and yet they contained all of the elements necessary to satisfy the adventurer - good plots, strong storylines, vivid prose, detailed descriptions, lots of locations, a reasonably friendly and witty parser, tricky puzzles, and attractive package and even, sometimes, graphics. My only gripe was the lack of a trumpet fanfare on completion of a game (the equivalent of this has only appeared in three adventures that I know of, namely *Beyond Zork*, *Trinity* and *Leisure Suit Larry*). However, I digress. How come with 520k to play with the only real improvement is in the quality of the graphics? Answer that and remain fashionable.

Interactive fiction should be precisely that. Something akin to reading a favourite novel except YOU make the decisions. You see, I love dragons, trolls and suchlike. I enjoy mentally wandering around strange landscapes and dungeons. I like making maps. Hackneyed concepts? Go and look around the science fiction stand in your local bookshop. There's no shortage of material there for the average fantasy fan, even if a lot of the concepts explored in those books are clichés. A cliché often becomes so because it contains a large element of truth. The truth is that I wish to continue playing quality adventure games into the wee small hours until either my computer gives up the ghost, or I do. And judging by the amount of calls I get on my adventure helpline I'm not alone. Thanks for listening. Phil Armstrong.

Well, has anyone else got views to air? Or answers to the above? Send letters to the usual address. Don't forget to write...." -click- brrrrrrrrrr...

Diary Of An Adventurer - Aged 13

May 29th 1989: Dear Diary, I haven't written in you for a long time coz I have been playing *Gnome Ranger* non-stop for the past six weeks! Toady, the class swot, showed me how to type things into the game and I got a lot further. This adventure stuff is real wizzo. At the moment I'm stuck again, but this time I think I've sussed it. If only I could kill that wicked witch and get onto something else. What's past that I don't know. I can't wait to find out. It's triffic! I take back what I said about *Official Secrets* coz they have done this game *Myth* and I should be playing that soon as they promised it to me by the end of next week. I have also stopped quite a lot of things that I used to do, like fishing and footer, as I don't have no money now that I buy all these adventure games and play them every night when I get home from school and in the half-term I am going to ring up the Helpline what they do (that's if I'm still stuck with Ingrid in the forest - Oo-er).

May 31st 1989: Dear Diary, Half-term is here and I have just phoned up that Helpline number. I got a man on the other end saying, "Hello, the Chief Adventure Weirdo is not here right now. He's gone out for a drink. Please call back in an hour." Phooey. Don't no one work no more? In the time between now and then I am going to ring up Suzie and see what she's been getting up to so far in the holidays. She is still hanging around Ricky and she says that when *Myth* arrives Ricky will finish it first. I can't wait to thrash him at the game, especially as I am so good now. Toady says he'll help me if I like, but I said no coz I want to beat him on my own self. And I have been reading all the back issues of *CONFIDENTIAL* which are really great once you realise they are not the loading instructions for *Gnome Ranger*. It said there that *Myth* was about Greek people and so I've been doing a lot of swotting about Poseidon and all the other gods. And what a life they lead - orgies, women and a bit of bitching on the side. Which reminds me, I've got to phone Suzie...

June 1st 1989: Dear Diary, Suzie was still angry with me. I really don't know what to do with her. She must like me really, but she really does her best not to show it at all. She's very good at hiding it, Diary. She called me a thickie, told me that she had spoken to the sexy voice on the Helpline and slammed the phone down. So I rung back and said 'No one slams the phone down on me' and then slammed the phone down. This went on for hours until finally she took her phone off the hook. Still can't get through to Mr. Trevillian. Now it's permanent engaged. I must finish *Gnome Ranger* and get *Myth* before anyone else. Hehehe.

3rd June 1989: Dear Diary, Today I received a package, and it contained *Myth* and all the back-dated *Info-com* games I have missed. Oh well, there goes the Summer holidays!

IT'S MURDER!

A top business Executive has been murdered. Can you find out How, Why, and Whodunnit?

Was the crime committed by a member of his Family, Business Competitors, the IRA, Moslem Extremists, the CIA, the Mafia, MI5, or someone else? As a player, in this latest Play by Mail scenario - **"ITS MURDER!"** you must find out - **and stay alive in the process!**

Will you choose to be a Scotland Yard Detective, a Private Investigator, a member of the Anti Terrorist Squad, or one of our other characters? The game has been written by experts, including a member of *MENSA* and a *PATHOLOGIST*. **"ITS MURDER!"** will challenge your powers of logic and deduction to their limits. Enrolment, Full Rules, and Pre-Play Murder Information £5.00. Turns £1.00. Postage paid both ways - no hidden extras. If not satisfied, return the registration pack complete within 7 days, and we will give you a refund. For further details or enrolment write to:

**MERLINS KINGDOM
FREEPOST
TINTAGEL, CORNWALL PL34 OBR
No Postage Stamp required**

Cheques and PO's only please.

Weather
will be
next.

